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BILL MUMY & MIGUEL FERRER
FROM LOST IN SPACE TO MARVEL'S COMET MAN — AND BEYOND

#44

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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Comics Interview

So far, there are only four titles from David Anthony Kraft's publishing company, but I like all of them.

• *MICRA* is an acronym for *Mind* Controlled *R*emote *A*utomaton. It is also one heck of a good comic book by Lamar Waldron and Tad Boonthanakit. This is a 12-issue limited series about a crippled woman who can project her consciousness into an automaton (see the title).

That is a much-too-simplified summation of a rich, complex SF novel in comic-book form. Tad's art has been compared to many different American artists (none of whom work Ted has seen; he was born in Thailand and grew up in Africa) and is remarkably clear and exciting.

Grade: A.

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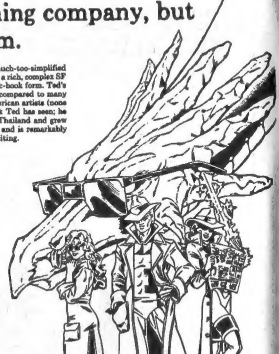

• *Aristocratic X-traterrestrial Time-Traveling Thieves* (*X-Thieves* for short) has had two first issues, which is annoying to indexers and compilers of price guides, but the bright, sprightly scripts by Henry Vogel and the appropriately humorous art of Mark Propst make up for that. One of the main features of this comic book is that, like the *Mad* comic books, the panels are filled with gags, such as the crisis hotline which warns: "New universe forming — disaster imminent!"

The Southern Knights make a guest appearance in the second first issue, in which the X-Thieves steal the formula for original Coca-Cola. This is one of the best of the funny comic books (and one of the handful that really *is* funny).

Grade: A.

X-THIEVES™

SOUTHERN KNIGHTS™

• I haven't seen the last couple of issues of *Southern Knights* yet but, unless the series has gone radically downhill since #16, this is still one of the best and most original of all the supergroups. Grade: A.

• While *Comics Interview* is not a comic book, I think I can squeeze in a recommendation. This excellent publication gives a well-rounded view of the industry, with interviews with writers, pencillers, inkers, letterers, colorists, and others.

Naturally, your interest in an issue will depend on who is being interviewed, but there have been 40 issues of *Comics Interview* and so totally dull ones — not even the *G.I. Joe* issue. Grade: A.

Four titles.
Four As. Four for four. Way to go, Dave.

— Don Thompson
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A
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CREDITS

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art & colors

UP FRONT

Summer convention season is in full swing and, this year, whether you're in the north, south, east or west — we'll be seeing you at the major shows (and at many regional cons, too!).

As I write this, I just returned from being Guest of Honor at **D. W. Howard**'s fourth annual SpartaCon in South Carolina, where readers and retailers alike made it gratifyingly clear that — even in the face of an unprecedented glut of comics such as the industry has never seen — the quality and effort put into every Comics Interview publication has made a *strong* impression.

One retailer told me that, when asked, she recommends only *two* independent titles: TURTLES and SOUTHERN KNIGHTS. Another said that, after making repeated recommendations, he took matters in his own hands and personally *bought* a copy of the KNIGHTS for one of his best customers. Result? The fellow who had been so resistant to a black-and-white "superhero title" came back and bought every back issue he could find! Yet another retailer declared the X-THIEVES the "best new series published in the past year by any publisher, period." And another informed me that every recent issue of COMICS INTERVIEW had sold out (some, like the Frazetta issue, #42, sold out the same day they went on sale!). Many readers consider MICRA the single most interesting science-fiction series they've ever seen — and weren't shy about recommending it *strongly* to other convention goers. All agreed that our books are tops.

As publisher of all these titles, it gave me a great sense of satisfaction that our efforts have not gone unnoticed, and that my pride in the Comics Interview group of publications is not misplaced. It's nice to be noticed!

By the time this sees print, the whole Comics Interview crew will have been guests — along with my old pal and partner, **George Perez** — at the seventh annual Dixie Trek convention in Atlanta. And we'll *all* be out at the San Diego Comic Con this summer, too! Various of us will also be at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair, the Chicago Comic Con, the Dallas Fantasy Fair, **Shelton Drum**'s Heroes Convention in North Carolina (again, with **George Perez**) and many, many more.

Come by and say "hi," show us your samples, and let us know what you think of our books. See you somewhere — soon!

— David

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"We had written professionally quite

BILL MUMY & MIGUEL FERRER

Marvel writers Bill Mumy and Miguel Ferrer may well have the most offbeat backgrounds of anyone presently working in comics. Mumy is best remembered for his stint as a pre-teen actor in the LOST IN SPACE TV series, but he's hardly quit working since then. If you've seen Barnes and Barnes' hilarious "Fish Heads" music video on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE or MTV, then you've seen his recent work.

Bill shares a longtime love of comics with collaborator Miguel — the son of actor Jose Ferrer and singer Rosemary Clooney, and a talented drummer and actor in his own right.

Together, Bill and Miguel have created COMET MAN for Marvel. In this interview with Shel Dorf, they talk about their past, their work — and what it was like being a member of a "brat pack" before brat packs were cool . . .

SHEL DORF: *Billy Mumy is pronounced Bill Mumy, like "roomy" — right?*

BILL MUMY: Yeah.

SHEL: *And Miguel Ferrer, the famous name Ferrer from the Broadway theater. What makes a couple of Hollywood brats think that they can get into the comic-book industry?*

MIGUEL FERRER: Perseverance. Talent.

BILL: Miguel and I have been dedicated with nothing but love and affection to comic books since 1960, and our collections are pretty big. It has definitely been the biggest influence on my life in terms of values when it comes to books.

MIGUEL: The thing is, we both love the medium very, very dearly. And before we came into this side of the business — writing comic books — we had written professionally quite a bit for the stage, episodic television, the film. So we had quite a bit of experience in dramatic writing, anyway.

SHEL: *Bill, most of your fame has come from a movie you did with Jimmy Stewart called DEAR BRIDGET, and the television series LOST IN SPACE. Did you read comic books on the set in between takes?*

BILL: I wrote comic books on the set, and I used to draw comic books all the time. In fact, when I was on LOST IN SPACE I had a comic book I used to make every few weeks about the cast members. There was a book called CAPTAIN PANTHER AND THE FOX that I used to draw, which was with me and **Mark Goddard**. He was Captain Panther and I was the fox.

MIGUEL: They are upstairs if you want to see them. *(Laughter.)*

SHEL: *Well, Miguel, let's talk about your early interest in comicbooks.*

BILL: Let's talk about your early collection that you do not have any more. *(Laughter.)*

MIGUEL: Let's not. When I was 16, I had a car that was broken, so I sold all my number ones that I had to get this car

a bit for the stage, television, film."

PHOTO: Shel Dorf

Scowlin' Miguel and Smilin' Billy display their shy laid-back relationship.

fixed — CAPTAIN AMERICA #1, FLASH #1.

SHEL: *So your transportation was furnished from comic books.*

MIGUEL: But if I had them today, I could buy a small island. There was a bookstore here in the mid '60s called Cherokee, run by **Burt Broome**, and he used to have all the #1 books for about $100 or $200 apiece.

BILL: I used to go there once a week with my dad. But I only had a $5 or $10 budget.

Miguel, on the other hand, got to buy all the number ones.

MIGUEL: Well, my parents were divorced at that point, and any kid from divorced parents can tell you you can score pretty nicely when birthdays roll around. *(Laughter.)* Every time I had a birthday or when Christmas rolled around, I would hit up my mom and dad both and they would toss me some money. I would go and buy, oh, I don't know, a hundred dollars worth of books.

SHEL: *Did they know that these were going to go up in value?*

MIGUEL: It sounds like a lot of money, but, okay, it is a nice hobby, and they say it is an investment. All right, fine. You know. By the time I was 16, I had discovered girls and drugs and music. Things like that, the important things in life, the things we all live for and . . .

BILL: Now that he is 31 he has given all that up! *(Laughter.)* Now he's gone back to comic books. *(Laughter.)*

MIGUEL: That's right. You know, I had lost interest in the books and, like I said, I had a car that didn't work, so I sold most of them. But I still have a lot of the books that I had as a kid.

SHEL: *You haven't given up girls. You're still married to Debby Boone, aren't you?*

MIGUEL: No, that's my brother.

SHEL: *That's your brother?*

MIGUEL: That's my younger brother. *(Laughter.)* No. Not me. Not married to **Debby Boone**. I'm married to somebody else. Yeah, my brother is married to **Debby Boone**, unfortunately. That is frightening.

SHEL: *So that makes Pat Boone your . . .*

MIGUEL: Nothing. *(Laughter.)* Absolutely nothing! Pat's a nice guy. I am kidding. I do like Pat. I like him. Anyway.

SHEL: *Miguel, what were your favorite comic-book heroes, or comic books?*

MIGUEL: I would say without a doubt it has got to be BATMAN. There is a very, very articulate preface — **Stephen King** wrote it — at the beginning of BATMAN #400. **King** put it as distinctly as anyone. He was so much more accessible to a kid than, say, Superman — who was kind of god, if you will. But BATMAN was just a guy, he did not have a gun, He just had his thing and his kid with him who we could all relate to. But he was a human being. He was a detective. He did not have to rely on some super power to be able to blow Gotham City into place after Lex Luthor moved it, or whatever. He was just a guy making his way the best he could, and he screwed up. That makes him my favorite.

AT LAST....

VANGUARD

....IN HIS OWN COLOR BOOK!

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OUTPOST:EARTH

Megaton Comics' color comic book line gets off to an explosive start with the June release of its first color title, OUTPOST:EARTH starring VANGUARD.

A soldier from a planet involved in an intergalactic war, VANGUARD has been stationed in a satellite orbitting the earth to protect it from invasion.

In OUTPOST:EARTH #1, VANGUARD travels into space aboard the USA shuttle ATLANTIS to inspect the damage to his ship caused by a Soviet attack.

There, he is fired upon by Soviet spacecraft. VANGUARD goes berserk, commandeers the Russian craft, and declares war on the Soviet Union.

OUTPOST:EARTH #1 is 32 full color pages of non-stop action written by co-creator Gary Carlson and drawn by Steve Adams, runner-up in the Marvel Comics' Try-Out contest.

The action-packed front cover was pencilled by VANGUARD co-creator Erik Larsen, now a top talent at DC Comics, and was inked by fan favorite Al Gordon.

MEGATON COMICS

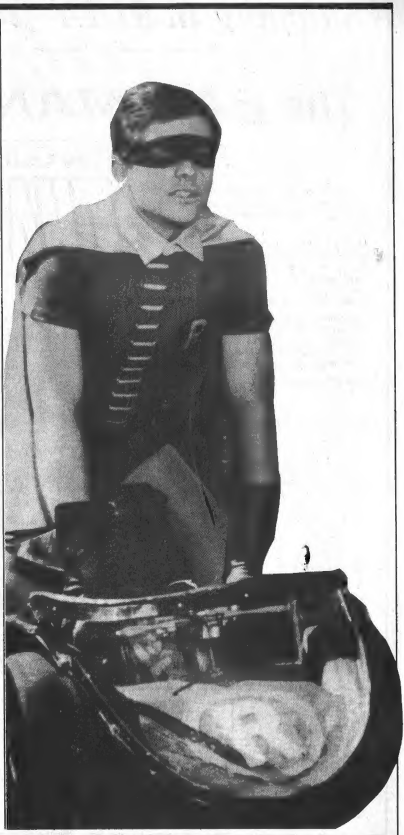
IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR HEROES...

"Burt Ward was a brat. . .Terrible. . ."

BILL: BATMAN is my favorite.
MIGUEL: Clearly.
BILL: When I was doing LOST IN SPACE, they were doing BATMAN on the same lot. Of course, we were on the same time zone, and I remember going over there all the time to sneak an extra Robin costume and things like that *(Laughter.)*
SHEL: *What was Adam West like?*
BILL: Adam was great. Adam was very friendly. Adam was very professional, and he was very nice to be around. **Burt Ward** was a brat. He was terrible on the lot. He was notoriously mean to everybody. I remember going over to the set when they first cast him and welcoming him to the lot, and I was such a fanatic — I mean, I wanted to be Robin in reality, anyway — and I was really anxious to meet him and everything. And he just kind of like shrugged me off like I was worse than slime.
SHEL: *Where did he come from?*
BILL: He had done some stunt work. I don't think he had done anything before that, and I don't think that he has done anything since then, although he has a lot of businesses that have done well. He hasn't grown much since then, either.
SHEL: *He was full grown then.*

MIGUEL: He was in his 20s, wasn't he?
SHEL: *I am sure if you met him today, he would apologize for being such a brat. Life has probably straightened him out by now.*
MIGUEL: Let's find him.
BILL: Let's find him and get him on the spot. If you're reading this, eventually we are going to hit you up to write a BATMAN story. Get ready. That's right. He's the greatest.
SHEL: *I once went into Julius Schwartz's office in the late '60s and asked why he didn't put the mystery back into BATMAN. And he said, "What is a guy like you reading comic books for?"*
MIGUEL: That's interesting.
SHEL: *I never dreamed that I would be hearing a question like that in the inner sanctum of the comic world itself. And I didn't have an answer. I said, "I love the medium, I love the artwork. I love the stories." What else do you want to hear, you know? I feel that the cartoon arts always have been an American folk art.*

BILL: Classic, legitimate American art.
MIGUEL: Absolutely.
BILL: I've never ever felt or wanted to apologize for that being my favorite form of entertainment. Some friends of ours just don't get it, just don't understand. *(Mumy imitates the friends.)* "You're writing



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Pencils . . . . . Chris Marrinan

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RETAILERS!

If you've also been carrying the *Champions* role-playing game in your store, check with your distributor for information on how you can use extra copies of the comic book to *boost* your sales!

HERO COMICS
at the Conventions!

***HERO COMICS** creative personnel will be at conventions in **CHICAGO, ATLANTA,** and **SAN DIEGO** this summer.*

We hope you'll stop by the Hero Comics table, and give us your opinion about all three of the Hero Comics titles!

"We had just finished THE TWILIGHT ZONE."

what? You're writing a comic book?''

MIGUEL: It's really interesting, though, **Mumy** and I have been acting for a long time, we've been musicians, we've done this and that, directed things. You know, ''*I* am going to direct a movie.'' People are impressed with that. When you say you write for Marvel Comics, the people who are the most disaffected say, ''What — you're kidding!'' It's unbelievable the response you get.

SHEL: *That's great. In America, comic books are still a children's medium in the eyes of the majority of the public. But, in Europe, it is not so at all.*

BILL: I think it is starting to get that way here. We do **Frank Miller** and **John Byrne** at their best. I just think that the level of their writing and the art has quickly elevated to legitimate. Going back to where we started in the first place; it wasn't written down to the audience. If you read those early issues of DETECTIVE before Batman got Robin, Batman was a bad-ass.

MIGUEL: We were very much into those books and the early Sandman stories and stuff.

SHEL: *So you have both decided that a corner of your lives is going to be for writing this comic. Tell me a little bit about this comic you are doing for Marvel.*

BILL: The way it all came about was we had just finished the TWILIGHT ZONE script, which was based around counterfeiting golden-age comic books and I've know **Jim Shooter** for a long time because I speak at sci-fi conventions on TWILIGHT ZONE. That is a good way for me to find books for my collections. It is not that I have a love of talking about LOST IN SPACE, but it is an opportunity to buy books. And meet girls. Why not?

SHEL: *Well, LOST IN SPACE is still being shown. I am sure that you meet people who are seeing it for the first time.*

BILL: Oh, yeah. I walk in and the kids will expect me to be bald. Anyway, at the San Diego convention last year, I was a guest speaker. Miguel and I were down there together, hunting down some golden-age books. Later, we were at a Marvel party, and **Shooter** walked up and said, ''What have you guys been doing lately?'' And I said we just finished a TWILIGHT ZONE. And he said, ''Oh, I didn't know you wrote. And I said, ''Yeah, I wrote a couple episodes of a TV series I did called SUNSHINE in the '70s, and Miguel and I have been writing some theater stuff and working on this TWILIGHT ZONE.'' And he said, ''Well, why don't you write a book?'' And also **Bob Schreck** from Comico comics . . .

SHEL: *Great guy!*

BILL: Great guy. I love Bob. I have known him since he was working for Creation Conventions, and he used to book me and always take care of me wherever I flew around. I have a lot of respect for Bob, and I have a lot of respect for Comico as well. Anyway, they both said to us, Marvel and Comico, ''hey, man, write us something and we would be really interested in putting it out.'' So a little light bulb went on in our heads, like — why didn't we think of this before? We came home and brainstormed, and we wrote the COMET MAN treatment. We sent it to Comico and we sent it to Marvel and they both wanted it. And we chose to go with Marvel because we wanted to interact with the characters we grew up reading, Fantastic Four and the Hulk, important characters in our series. So we did it for Marvel although there are bonuses and there are negatives to that.

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"Marvel flooded the market . . .we've

Writers Miguel and Bill tackle the Hulk.

SHEL: *How do you fellows write?*
MIGUEL: It's interesting. *(Laughter.)* It's funny. We do everything a lot of different ways. Sometimes we really do everything together, and other times Bill will run with it or I will take it home and do a number of things on my own, both plotting and scripting. There really isn't a pattern. And we edit each other pretty closely as well. When we first started we did everything together. Then we found that we were comfortable with each other enough as friends, that we didn't feel that we would be stepping on each other's toes. . .
BILL: We were able to anticipate each other and realize when one guy could do one thing a little better.
MIGUEL: Let's say that we had 15 pages lying around. If either one of us got inspired, we felt comfortable to just sit down and run with whatever we had going and then turn it over to the other one and he would edit it and make changes back and forth
BILL: When we were actually typing the final script, we were usually together, making sure that we were both happy with all the dialogue and stuff.

MIGUEL: Sometimes I look at Bill and say, "This page right here needs the classic **Billy Mumy** treatment." And you'll know just what I mean.

BILL: It's a trade secret. I can't tell you.
SHEL: *Tell me why you decided to go to Marvel instead of Comico. Comico has really taken off since they picked up ROBOTECH*
MIGUEL: The considerations were twofold. First of all, financial certainty, given the greater circulation, the newsstand circulation. And secondly, as Bill said, the opportunity to have our character interact in the Marvel universe with the guys that we grew up with and love, like the Fantastic Four.
SHEL: *Does Marvel know that you are going to do that?*
BILL: It's already done. It is a six-issue series
MIGUEL: They have nice guest shots.
SHEL: *Oh, that's great.*
BILL: Miguel and I decided that Marvel would be the best because **Jim Shooter** gave us quite a sales pitch that in terms of licensing for films and newsstand distribution, etc., etc., and in terms of reaching more people Marvel, would be the best choice. And, unfortunately, the way that things have turned out. . our book was originally scheduled to come out in March, and it was pushed back until October. We have lost newsstand distribution.
SHEL: *Oh, no!*
BILL: We are direct sales only. If we had gone with Comico, our book would have come out in February and we would have had the same distribution we are getting now. Supposedly, Marvel flooded the market with mini-series last year and the publisher, somebody above **Jim Shooter**, who I have never met, said no more mini-series. So they put a freeze on the whole thing for six months. Also, book one originally started with the space shuttle blowing up, and that was something where we were treading water for a few months because everybody didn't want to appear to be jumping on the disaster bandwagon.
MIGUEL: We've just had a whole lot of bullshit laid on us. None of it has affected our love of what we are doing.

BILL: We are real happy with **Kelly Jones'** work, and he says that he is doing the work of his career. I just have to agree.
SHEL: *That's exciting.*
BILL: You know, when you've worked with the kind of people that Miguel and I have worked with in the film industry — with **Rod Serling** and **Alfred Hitchcock** and all the **Disneys** and **Jimmy Stewarts** — you can't help but pick up a little bit of that direction and try to apply it to your own book. And, hopefully, we've learned stuff along the way.

MIGUEL: We've learned a lot on this book, Shel. We are a hundred times better now than when we first sat down and tried to script book one. I mean we've really learned technique.
BILL: We wanted to do this book in a pulpy kind of golden-age style. It turned out that the book took on much more of an ET horror style. The COMET MAN, if I had to sum it up as best as I could, is a psychological drama of a family situation in a science-fiction setting.
SHEL: *Does he have secret powers?*

MIGUEL: He does have secret powers. He is a pretty powerful guy.
BILL: The great thing about him is that he doesn't know how to use them. Even though he has these powers, the thrust of the story is a family story, how his wife and his son are abducted by his wife's ex-lover. And what happens when he returns to Earth reconstructed when the World thinks he's dead in space, and the covert intelligence agency which gets ahold of this family. It gets really involved. It's more like a MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE than a SUPERMAN.
MIGUEL: It's not like a SUPERMAN

had a whole lot of bullshit laid on us."

from the '50s where he gets up and moves planets.

BILL: Nothing like that.

MIGUEL: It involves real people. The story is a tragedy.

BILL: Clearly a tragedy, about real people. When they get hit, they hurt.

SHEL: *So many kids in this generation are having really tough experiences with life. I don't know if the last generation was that battered or messed up with drugs or lifestyles, or whatever. But this loosening of morals and getting away from old values has produced some pretty horrible results, with some people who have died young and have not seen the fulfillment of their potential.*

BILL: You're talking about a lot of our friends.

MIGUEL: Yeah. I think that all that is in our book. We really didn't pull any punches. I'd say in most respects along these lines, Marvel has been great.

BILL: I agree with that completely. Marvel has not . . .

MIGUEL: . . . stepped on our toes.

BILL: They have really let us go further than I thought they would.

SHEL: *Well, everybody who hears that you two are doing comic books are kind of rooting for you already, before anything is seen.*

MIGUEL: People have been real supportive.

BILL: A lot of times — at least for myself more than Miguel, because of being famous as a child — people tend to look at the things you do as an adult with a "yeah but . . ." kind of an attitude.

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"I spent some time with Jimmy Stewart."

THE COMET MAN

SHEL: *Being a child star must have been a whole different thing. Do you want to talk about that?*
BILL: I loved what I did as a kid.
SHEL: *How did you get into it?*

BILL: It was really just a lucky break. I broke my leg when I was 4 years old and I spent six months watching TV.

SHEL: *But your grandfather was an agent, you told me earlier.*
BILL: Yep, he was.
SHEL: *The agent of Boris Karloff, and many other people, so your family was around the Hollywood scene?*

BILL: Exactly. I spent six months watching TV and I said, "Hey, that's what I want to do. I want to be on TV." My folks, my mother, the first side of my family, had been with the business, knew what it was, wasn't impressed by it or afraid of it. I said I wanted to do it. She put me on ROMPER ROOM, which anybody can do, you know. I went on ROMPER ROOM for three weeks — had a great time. She got me an agent and really it just kind of . . . the old snowball kind of thing.
SHEL: *Well, you had sincerity. Don't they say that if you have sincerity, that's a big part of it?*
BILL: Well, who is more open than a little kid? If someone can direct him and he or she can take that direction, they are just natural performers. You know, all they do is play anyway and pretend to be Zorro. I was always being a superhero or Zorro at home so it was easy to go be Anthony or Will or someone when I wasn't home.
MIGUEL: I spent some time not too long ago with **Jimmy Stewart**, just an afternoon — he and Bill did a film together many, many years ago. I said that indeed I was working with Bill on some projects and that Bill said to say "hi." And his face lit up and he said, "Ah, **Billy Mumy**, **Billy Mumy**, he was the best kid actor ever. I mean ever. He had humor, he had everything. He was the best kid actor that ever was." Coming from a guy like that. .
SHEL: *I think it showed on the screen, too.*
BILL: I've had a good life. I certainly can't complain.
SHEL: *How old are you now?*
BILL: I'm 32, and I started acting when I was 5. And I'd done about 200 television shows by the time I was, I don't know, 19.
SHEL: *Was it difficult for you to memorize lines?*
BILL: No. It's very easy to do that. In fact, I have what you call an audible, not photogenic, memory. Once I have said something out loud a couple of times, it's just there — it stays real easily. I was learning parts before I could learn to read.
SHEL: *Did you have to learn cues?*
BILL: I'd learn everybody's lines. I used to do shows, I remember, with **Cloris Leachman** and stuff like that. And she'd goof up all the time and I'd always know everybody else's lines. She thought I was obnoxious, but I couldn't help it. I'd just learned them all because I'd heard them all.
SHEL: *Miguel, tell me about your acting class. You're teaching?*
MIGUEL: Well, no, I substitute for a couple friends of mine who are teachers full-time. I wouldn't want to teach full-time. It's such a responsibilty.

SHEL: *What is your approach? What do you tell the students?*
MIGUEL: My approach is very simple, straightforward from basically a director's approach, because I am also a director. I didn't study with a method. I don't understand that approach. It doesn't work for me. I don't do a lot of exercises. I feel

it confuses me, I think it confuses most people.
SHEL: *Your father's CYRANO. . . I didn't see it on the stage, but it affected me so deeply when I saw that film — incredible*

"I was really intimidated by my dad."

performance! Has your father had any input in to your interest in the theater and acting?

MIGUEL: Keeping me out of the business for a long time.

SHEL: *Really? Why?*

MIGUEL: Well, just . . . I sort of had a career in music before I decided to become an actor, because I was just really intimidated by my dad.

SHEL: *Oh.*

MIGUEL: I didn't really grow up with him. As you know, my parents were divorced when I was pretty young, so he was not around when I was growing up. And, just as you said . . . he is *so* good! He won six or eight Tonys and an Academy Award and all this other stuff. He was just really intimidating. And I wanted to act a long time before I had the courage to really take the step.

BILL: It was **Billy Mumy** who gave him his first job.

MIGUEL: It was a series called SUNSHINE, and Bill was the star in an episode that he had written. He had written a part for a drummer and the guy had to play drums and say a few lines, and he said, "Why don't you do this?" And I said, "Really? Do you really think that I could do this?" And he said, "Yeah, you'd be great. Come on in and meet the producer and we'll do it." That really was the thing that gave me the confidence to go ahead and do it.

SHEL: *How many plays have you acted in? Can you remember?*

MIGUEL: Oh quite a few.

SHEL: *What's your favorite?*

MIGUEL: My favorite play was also the first play that I ever directed.

BILL: RED RYDER?

MIGUEL: Yeah. It's called WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK, RED RYDER? by **Mark Medoff.**

SHEL: *What was your role in that?*

MIGUEL: Well, actually, I was to play the role of Stephen, the title character. And then later on, in a subsequent production at a big 1,140-seat theatre in Miami, starring **Terrence Knox**, he got stabbed in the leg during a performance in the role of Teddy, the bad guy. So they flew me in from Los Angeles because I was the only one who could possibly do it. I wound up playing both of those roles at one time or another. I really enjoyed that.

SHEL: *Has your dad seen your performance?*

MIGUEL: Yeah, my dad has seen my work a lot. A lot!

SHEL: *And what does he say?*

MIGUEL: He's real complimentary. He likes my work.

SHEL: *Now how did you and Bill meet for the first time?*

MIGUEL: We met through a mutual girlfriend.

BILL: Yeah, a mutual girlfriend in 1971. I was going out with **Dean Martin's** daughter and Miguel was going out with **Stan Freedburg's** daughter, and they were best friends.

SHEL: *And you were both into comic books at that time?*

BILL: Not as much . . .

MIGUEL: Not exactly . . . the girls.

SHEL: *Okay. Miguel, I would not be a good interviewer if I did not ask you about your mother, Rosemary Clooney. Tell me a little bit about being Rosemary's son.*

MIGUEL: Well, gee, I sort of want to be honest with you. I really didn't get to

"We've had songs on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE."

know her very well until later in life. I was basically raised by her mother, my grandmother. You know, I was pretty much uncontrollable and out of the house from the time that I was 14 on. And doing what *I* wanted to do.

SHEL: *Which was? Music?*

MIGUEL: Music, primarily. I was a drummer, working full-time.

SHEL: *And getting into trouble, I guess?*

MIGUEL: Yeah, I was a wild kid. So I came to know my mother later in life and we're just . . . we're incredibly close right now. As a matter of fact, I saw her before I came here. I'll tell you, I am so proud of her. She's had a real hard time and has come back so strongly with so much integrity. I just respect her and am so proud of her as a person and as a performer.

BILL: And she sings so well.

SHEL: *Miguel, I want to ask you a very serious question. Do you buy her toilet paper and paper towels?*

MIGUEL: I get it for free. *(Laughter.)* I go to her house and steal it, are you kidding?

SHEL: *She is one of the great jazz singers of all time. It was so great to have a record of her that she did with Marlene Dietrich.*

MIGUEL: Now for the first time she is being recognized as a jazz singer. And she is singing so . . . so great.

BILL: Ah, man, her pipes are hot.

SHEL: *Bill, let's go back to you and talk about some of the conventions you attend and what the public reaction to your appearance is.*

BILL: They go over pretty good.

SHEL: *For instance, we know LOST IN SPACE is in syndication, so a lot of people are seeing you for the first time. These people are expecting you to be how old?*

BILL: Well, I did LOST IN SPACE from 10 to 13.

SHEL: *How do you handle this?*

BILL: No problem. They have to accept me for the way I am. I ain't going to be 10 again. *(Laughter.)*

MIGUEL: He takes a lot of tranquilizers.

BILL: Well, I've been lucky that even though I certainly don't appear on television or films as much as I did when I was younger, I've kept working. I do at least one or two shows every year. So I know the questions I'll get at a sci-fi con are going to be centered around the sci-fi stuff I did, the TWILIGHT ZONEs, the HITCHCOCKS, LOST IN SPACE stuff. But I don't really care what people perceive me to have been or perceive me to be. I just honestly answer people's questions. I try to be entertaining in remembering little bits and pieces in my experiences with **Hitchcock** or **Serling** or **Disney** or those kind of people, and I give them an honest response to their questions. But I don't care what they think.

SHEL: *Doing all these other things — that's what is neat about both of you. You are so much into the creative flow.*

BILL: Well, really we have been lucky in that sense. And the interesting thng is that I feel that they all complement one another.

MIGUEL: So do I.

BILL: I have a band called **Barnes and Barnes**, and we released our sixth album in August. We put out a home video package in September.

SHEL: *That says a lot right there, that you have done six albums. The others must have sold, right?*

MIGUEL: Sold enough to keep making the other ones. "Fish Heads" was kind of a cult hit that we've made. And we've had videos and songs on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, STEVE MARTIN and MTV all the time. So we've been successful in that area. I also write with other rock bands. I wrote eight songs on the pop band **America's** last three albums. In fact I will be playing with them in Michigan this next week, at Pine Knob. I've produced and written songs for other artists.

SHEL: *Have either one of you had a straight job as far as punching a time clock working 9 to 5?*

BILL: When I was 15. . .

MIGUEL: The closest thing I experienced like that was delivering pizza when I was 16.

BILL: When I was 15, I worked at Do Re Mi record store for the summer.

MIGUEL: Outside of that, we've been just making a living.

BILL: Yeah. Earning a living. It's not like our folks tossed us money. That ain't the case.

MIGUEL: Definitely. No matter what anybody thinks about Hollywood kids and all that stuff, that's not true.

BILL: People do think about child actors and stuff that the parents take them for a ride. I mean, my folks never spent my money, they invested it all for me. And they never let me get away with thinking I was hot shit because I was on TV. If my ego started to get out of control, they put me in my place.

SHEL: *I could tell that right away when I met you, that you are pretty level-headed. And we know that you are producing a comic, and we know that the public can either put thumbs up or thumbs down. Right?*

MIGUEL: Yeah

BILL: I just hope that we can be as lucky as so many of the people in our industry, working on comic books when we are in our late 70s. I've got the enthusiasm for it, and I know that Miguel does, too.

Th-Th-Th-That's all, folks!

PHOTO: Shel Dorf

"I'll tell ya, there was a powerful col-

Photo: Eileen Davis Mumy

Revealed at last: The secret identities of Captain America, Superman, and Batman! From the left — Jack (King) Kirby (whom we interviewed in issue #41), Jerry (Superman) Siegel, and Bob (Caped Crusader) Kane.

PARTY OF TITANS

Standing (left to right): Harrigan Ferrer, Jerry Siegel, Mark Hamill, Joanne Siegel, Roz Kirby, Jack Kirby, and Robert Heimer. Kneeling (left to right): Bob Kane, Elizabeth Kane, Bill Mumy, and Miguel Ferrer.

Photo: Eileen Davis Mumy

Recently, a once-in-a-lifetime bash was held at the home of Bill and his wife Eileen Davis Mumy. Comics superstars Jack Kirby, Bob Kane and Jerry Siegel were the guests of honor, and no one would contradict me if I say that in Bill's home that night walked three men who forged an industry for the rest of us to enjoy.

A couple of days ago when I spoke to Roz Kirby she told me she still gets goosebumps just remembering that night. It sounds like one party I really would've like to have attended, but since I didn't, I'll have to sit back with the rest of you and let Bill give Shel Dorf a brief recap . . .

lective energy in this house that night."

SHEL DORF: *Bill, you recently gave the dinner party of the half century for the world of comic-book history. Can you please go into detail about that night?*

BILL MUMY: That was a great night. In a way, **Julie Schwartz** is the man responsible for that happening. Julie, who I like and I think is a very funny guy, comes to L.A. every few months and sees his pals from the Golden Age days at DC. Well, Julie knows that Miguel and **Mark Hamill** and I are big Golden Age fans, and Julie enjoys the Hollywood side of things, so he's arranged some lunches over the past year or so with us and **Jerry Siegel, Bob Kane** — Mark and I went out to Jack and Roz's home one day last summer — it's been great. As far as I'm concerned, these guys should be household names with as much money as **Stephen Spielberg**.

I really enjoyed meeting them and thought it would be nice if we all got together for a homecooked meal. My wife Eileen and I got married in October, and she was anxious to use all the new plates and stuff we got as wedding gifts, so I called everybody up and invited them, and they accepted. Eileen made a feast for **Jack** and **Roz Kirby, Jerry** and **Joanne Siegel, Bob Kane** and his fiance **Elizabeth, Miguel** and **Harrigan Ferrer, Mark** and **Marylou Hamill,** and **Robert Haimer**, (my musical partner in Barnes & Barnes and lifelong comic collector). Eileen outdid herself. She's an amazing cook. She made, from scratch: vegetable soup, chicken soup, Caeser salad, spinach souffle, pasta, two kinds of chicken, potatoes, garlic bread, cookies and Poundcake . . . anyway, it was good food. Everyone had a really nice time.

Jack, Bob and Jerry hadn't been together in more than thirty years, they figured. They talked about the early days and lots of comic people they knew; we looked at books of theirs from the '30s through the '60s in my collection; it was fun. Bob was showing Elizabeth great stuff from his early Batman DETECTIVES that she hadn't seen before; Jerry talked about the Spectre, and ACTION and SUPERMAN covers that **Joe Shuster** drew; Jack toasted Jerry, saying nobody would be there, if it weren't for Jerry and Joe's Superman . . . I learned that Joanne was the model for Lois Lane, that's how they met . . . heard some fun stories about Jerry, Joe and Joanne at the beginning of Superman . . . learned that Roz inked some early CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN . . . Bob told us about **Leonardo DaVinci** being the biggest inspiration in the final look for The Bat-Man with his flying-machine plans.

We talked about STAR WARS, old movies, music, the new BATMAN film, the old BATMAN TV show, LOST IN SPACE, Broadway, comics people, The TWILIGHT ZONE, Jack's street-gang youth, Demons, the DARK KNIGHT, new film projects, new comic projects, graphic novels — we even listened to "Fish Heads."

I'll tell ya, there was a powerful collective energy in this house that night! We looked at the past with affection, and looked at the future with vitality. It was a great pleasure to host their company, and I look forward to doing it again.

A red-hot copy of Barnes & Barnes' 45 RPM record — as heard on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE — get your deejay to play it!

Badder than JLA! More powerful than the West Coast Avengers — Bill Mumy, Jack Kirby, Jerry Siegel, Bob Kane, Miguel Ferrer and Mark (STAR WARS) Hamill.

Photo: Eileen Davis Mumy

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW with RAMM conducted by American Network's BARBARA FUDD. For reasons that will soon become apparent, this particular segment has never seen the airwaves. (All dialects and speech impediments have been revised to resemble the English language.)

FUDD: *First of all, I would like to thank you for granting this interview. There seems to be some confusion, if not controversy, surrounding your origins.*

RAMM: I ain't confused. I ain't controverted, neither.

FUDD: *Do you actually come from another planet?*

RAMM: Yeah. Do you actually come from this one?

FUDD: *What is your planet called?*

RAMM: "Pulverized."

FUDD: *What was it called before it was pulverized?*

RAMM: None of your business. You couldn't pronounce it anyway. Not unless you have a vocal range of six octaves, a second set of teeth halfway down your throat, and a spare half hour.

FUDD: *Do you mean it takes half an hour to pronounce the name of your planet? Your people must have wasted a lot of time*

RAMM: Naw. We didn't mention it much. We knew where we were.

FUDD: *And now you believe yourself to be the sole survivor of that world. Do you have any regrets or anxieties about that?*

RAMM: What are you talkin' about?

FUDD: *Well, you must feel profound sorrow, or maybe even guilt.*

RAMM: Guilt? Because I'm alive and they're all dead? Don't be an a**hole. I feel great.

FUDD: *Confronting you in person, the first thing one notices is your size. How big are you?*

RAMM: Damn big.

FUDD: *Would you elaborate?*

RAMM: No.

FUDD: *Can we discuss your . . . I guess I would have to describe them as "horns." Are they functional or decorative?*

RAMM: They ain't just for show, if that's what you mean. I use 'em when I throw a Ch'orm Fladoo on somebody.

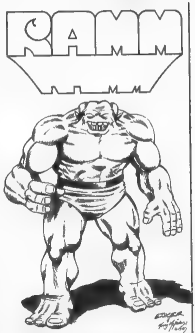
FUDD: *Oh. What's that like? Suppose you were to do that to me? What would you do with your horn?*

RAMM: Stick it in your ear.

FUDD: *You come off as very abusive when you say things like that. Do you think you might have a sense of hostility stemming from the fact that you feel you live in a world where you don't really belong?*

RAMM: I would take my horns and put them in your ears. That's how a Ch'orm Fladoo works.

FUDD: *Oh. And why do you do this Ch'orm Fladoo? Is it something sexual?*



RAMM: Get your mind out of the gutter, Lady. A Ch'orm Fladoo is just for everyday conversation When a language spans six octaves, and most of the time you're screaming at the top of all three of your lungs, you start to look for a quieter way to communicate before everybody goes crazy. Lucky we had a knack for mind reading. And as for your crack about my hostility, I always belong wherever I happen to be.

FUDD: *You seem very secure.*

RAMM: I guess I would, by comparison.

FUDD: *So your spoken language was very complex and very musical.*

RAMM: Mostly, it was damn tricky. Like, if we were sitting at the dinner table and somebody hollered, *"TWARKLAM PRUKK GA FLAMP ROOPA!,"* that meant, "Please pass the bowl of green stuff." If they said the same thing in a whisper, it meant, "Let's stab Grandma in the eye with a fruit knife."

FUDD: *How did you survive the vacuum of space without a space ship or space suit?*

RAMM: I held my breath.

FUDD: *It's hard to believe —*

RAMM: Look, we're talking about a whole different kind of lungs and a whole different kind of air. You Earth types ain't too broadminded, are you?

FUDD: *Honest. I'm really making the effort. You seem to be able to breathe our air fairly well. Is it really that different from what you're used to?*

RAMM: This pansy-gas atmosphere is JUNK. I couldn't hold my breath for more than three hours in this stuff. The only good thing about this wimpy air is it's thin enough to make moving around easier.

FUDD: *There's a theory that explains why you didn't burn up when you entered Earth's atmosphere: that your home planet had such a thick atmosphere that the inhabitants developed a partial immunity to friction. Do you think that's true?*

RAMM: Nope.

FUDD: *Do you have any theories of your own?*

RAMM: Nope.

FUDD: *Getting back to your planet . . .*

RAMM: *(Laughter.)* Not much chance of that at this point.

FUDD: *What was it like? How did you work, how did you play? What do you miss the most?*

RAMM: The cars. They were delicious.

FUDD: *You ate your cars?*

RAMM: We had to. Parking was impossible.

FUDD: *What about recreation? What did you do for fun?*

RAMM: We had this game called [untranslatable for five minutes]. It was a big money sport. It was a lot like this game your kids here play. Laser Tag, is it? Except that instead of beams of light, our guns would shoot these high-speed blobs of molten glass.

FUDD: *Wasn't that dangerous?*

RAMM: It sure as hell was. Sucking chest wounds, flaming stadiums. Really heavy turnover in the pro teams. Players and spectators both.

FUDD: *That was murder!*

RAMM: Yep. That's right. At the end of every season, the championship team was always tried and convicted. We weren't savages, y'know.

FUDD: *Did you ever play that sport?*

RAMM: Next question.

FUDD: *When you first arrived on Earth, you were about one foot tall, is that correct?*

RAMM: Yeah.

FUDD: *And now you seem to be slightly taller than the average human male. How do you explain that?*

RAMM: Beats me. Must have been something I ate.

FUDD: *Do you have any plans for the future?*

RAMM: I dunno. Maybe grow another hundred feet and terrorize Tokyo.

FUDD: *You can't be serious.*

RAMM: I can, but it takes a lot of special equipment. Listen, my manager seems to want me to be some kind of showbiz freak for hire. Monster movies and that kind of [expletive]. And I've heard from some outfit who wants to dress me up in leotards so I can help them save the world every month or so. Both those options strike me as a crock. So I'm getting a handle on the kind of stuff I DON'T want to do. But I'm willing to sell out or be a hero if the price is right. I'm pretty flexible as long as I don't have to put up with idiots. Which reminds me, this interview's over.

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"I came in and started doing DONALD DUCK."

FLOYD

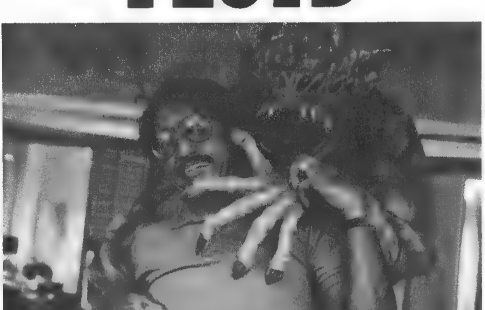


Photo: Paul Power

Floyd Norman and landlord.

NORMAN

Floyd Norman is a cartoonist and animator. This interview took place at Walt Disney Studios, in his office, which is in the same building as the Disney archives. Floyd Norman started his comic-book career as an assistant to Bill Woggon on the old KATY KEENE comic book...

KEN JONES: *Floyd, what are you doing now for Walt Disney studios?*

FLOYD NORMAN: I am back on comic strips and that kind of thing. I kind of wondered at first, when the job was offered to me, if I could do this or not and they said, "You've worked at Disney for a number of years — you know the characters, you know their personalities." This was in the later part of '83, so I thought, what the heck, I'll give it a try. I came in and started doing Donald Duck gags and some Goofy stories and they seemed to like what I was doing. So I am still here, still doing it. What's nice about it is there's a real variety — for instance, there's a comic strip that's a Christmas story and it'll be carried by papers around the Christmas season. Then there is also comic strips, the gags that appear daily. We also do comic stories, mainly for the overseas market.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Floyd Norman

Born: 22 June 1935 — Santa Barbara, CA

Residence: 543 E. Marigold Street, Altadena, CA

Training: Art Center College of Design

Credits: Disney feature films, Saturday morning television, TV commercials

Favorite Comics: KATY KEENE, SCRIBBLY

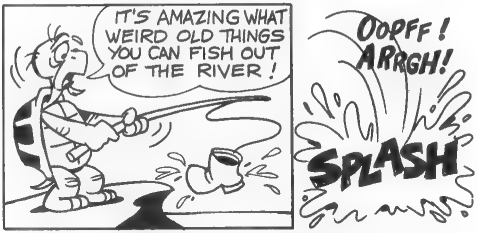
KEN: *I understand that a lot of the "overseas" market material will be reprinted in the States by Gladstone Comics.*

FLOYD: That's good.

KEN: *A fellow has bought up the licenses to the Disney Comics and will start distributing the Disney Comics heavily in the United States.*

FLOYD: It still seems that Europe has a higher regard for comics than they do over here. They do better over there. Everybody likes them over there and it's kind of hard to get things rolling over here, be-

"I did a lot on the animation se-



HUCK'S LANDING, developed by Scott Shaw & Floyd.

cause the market's not the same as it used to be, which is a shame.

KEN: *It really is, considering that comics are a native American art form.*

FLOYD: For some reason it's just regarded as a thing for kids. It seems that the Europeans take comics a bit more seriously, not that comics should be taken *too* seriously.

KEN: *Having done both, what do you think the difference between comic books and animated cartoons is?*

FLOYD: Quite a bit, actually. They're both so different. Although a lot of guys from comic books have come into animation and *vice versa*. It's a different way of working, a different way of thinking, I enjoy them both. With film I think you're concerned with time. The key thing is, you're thinking in terms of time and movement. With comics you have it on paper and you can stare at it for an hour or for just two seconds. With film you're locked into time thinking about how long this will take on the screen. Apart from that however, if you're talking about artists adapting to either medium, I think they can do it. But I think that the time factor is the big difference. You're dealing with something you watch on the screen in a certain amount of time as opposed to sitting down and holding a book in your hands.

KEN: *What have been your credits at Disney Studios?*

FLOYD: The first feature I worked on was SLEEPING BEAUTY. After that I worked on 101 DALMATIANS, then I got drafted. The funny thing about DALMATIONS is, I got drafted, was in the army two years, came back and worked on the very end of DALMATIONS! The next project we did was SWORD IN THE STONE. I worked on that from start to finish. I did a lot on the animation sequences that were in MARY POPPINS — that was a fun thing to work on. Then I got my chance to work on storyboards for the film JUNGLE BOOK. That was a real break, to get out of animation — not because I didn't like animation, but it was keen to do something different. Actually that was my break, because after JUNGLE BOOK I left here to go out and do educational films. I didn't return here until 1971 on the film ROBIN HOOD.

© 1996 Tom Carter Productions

quences that were in Mary Poppins . . . ”

© 1986 Archie Comics

KEN: *You've worked at some other animation studios, too. Why don't you tell us about that?*

FLOYD: Hanna-Barbera, kind of off-and-on, because in Saturday morning animation work is off-and-on. You'd work a season then you'd be off again and you might skip a year and be somewhere else. I did a number of things, I worked on shows like GODZILLA. I got a chance to work with producer **Doug Wildey**. After GODZILLA I got to work on a kind of revival of the FLINTSTONES. They brought the FLINTSTONES back and it was fun. That was when **Scott Shaw** was into layout. The next good show was the SMURFS. I got a chance to work on the first couple of seasons. I thought that turned out well. It hit the air in September with the highest rating, I think, of any Saturday morning TV show. I got a chance to meet Peyo. It was really kind of wild, because he doesn't speak any English and I don't speak French, so we had to interpret everything. It was fun having him around and to work with. He seemed pleased with the way everything turned out so it was a good experience. I got a chance to have him autograph a Smurf he drew for me.

KEN: *You were an assistant to Bill Woggon who did KATY KEENE. Can you tell us something about that experience?*

FLOYD: I read the Archie Comics when I was a kid — ARCHIE and PEP and a few others. **Bill Woggon** had a Katy Keene back-up story in part of one of the ARCHIE comics and I would read those. I never ever knew he was living in Santa Barbara, California, until it suddenly occurred to me that I would see this Woggon Wheels Ranch and I'd think, ''Gee, this guy is really here in town.'' I got to meet **Woggon** only because of my science teacher in high school. I was always drawing cartoons in class and my science teacher played golf with Woggon and he mentioned to Bill that he had this kid in class who was always drawing cartoons — maybe you should meet him. So that's how I got to meet Bill. He saw my stuff when I was still in high school and he offered me a chance to be his assistant and that's how you might say I broke into comics.

KEN: *That was basically the comic book?*

FLOYD: Yeah, I started out as his assistant, just doing simple stuff. It was really just a way of going to school. I inked borders and did all of the little stuff that he didn't have time to do. I began to gradually work up to doing more and more artwork in the book.

KEN: *Didn't you also do some work with Mark Evanier for the Hanna-Barbera comic books that came out of Marvel?*

ROCKET SHIPS
FOR SIS, RANDY, KO
ERROL SWOON
K.O.
THIS ROCKET PAGE TELLS A STORY! MORE ARE KO KELLY AND KATY FLOATING ALONG IN THE CLOUDS IN KO'S ROCKET! OH! BUT AFTER KO'S BOOKS AWAY!
ROCKET SHIP NO.2 WITH HIS BOOKS GLOBE ROCKET NO.3 WHILE SIS, THE CHUCKY AND JOCKS ON FROM HERE ON IN! OHH, SOON SHIP NO.4 BUT ERROL SWOON ISN'T GOING TO LET KO GO AWAY! ESCAPE TO THE MOON WITH KATY!—HE'S ABOUT TO TAKE OFF AFTER THEM IN HIS ROCKET SHIP! KO!
BEGORRA AN' RANDY CAN'T FLY AWAY WITH KATY IN HIS NEW ROCKET SHIP! I'LL SHOW HIM!
ROCKET SHIPS ON THIS PAGE DESIGNED BY THESE READERS:
1) JIMMY BESSINGER, 1350 EAST 23 AVE. DENVER, COLO.
2) KIM AVEDON, 17TH ST. W. NEW YORK, N.Y.
3) JOYCE NORTON, RT. 2, BOX 75 N. CHARLESTON, MISS. S.C.
4) ALVIN RUSSELL FRANCIN AVE. CENTER MORICHES NEW YORK
5) ANTHONY CARDILLA 206 TROOMAN AVE. ORANGE, N.J.
6) ROCKET RUNWAY ALSO BY ANTHONY CARDILLA.
HUMPH! RANDY AND KO CAN'T ESCAPE TO THE MOON WITH (HIM) MY DEAR KATY!
E.S.

“Some black-and-white stats I found of my work on KATY KEENE back in the fifties.”

FLOYD: Yeah, I had been working in animation for a number of years, but hadn't worked in comic books for years. I just wanted to see if I could still do it. Mark was there doing the Hanna-Barbera comics. I said, ''Gee, I've got to try it. I wonder if I can still do it?'' So I began to do pencilling for Mark on the Hanna-Barbera stuff. It was fun to get back into comics again.

KEN: *Do you remember the characters you drew for Mark?*

FLOYD: I did Captain Caveman, a character called Hong Kong Fooey, Jabber Jaws, and a lot of the current stuff Hanna-Barbera was doing then. I would get a full script, usually typewritten, and I would work from that and sketch it out. I noticed, too, that comics had shrunk the size I was use to working at back in the '50s and '60s — the original size was now quite a bit smaller. So I had to adjust to that, but it was okay — I worked in pencil and a lot of the stuff that I did was inked by **Scott Shaw**. I think we made a good team.

"I grew up in Hawaii watching samurai

STAN SAKAI

Stan Sakai is exactly what you'd expect a man who spends his time fantasizing about a feudal Japanese world full of funny animals to be like. Soft spoken, modest and with a twinkle in his eye and a ready grin, Stan plunged ahead with this interview, amazed at his sudden fame. The interview took place in Stan's cozy living room filled with books, stuffed animals and original art...

KEN JONES: *I know a lot of people probably ask you this question, but when you decided to tell stories about ancient Japan and the samuari code and all that, why did you decide to use funny animals?*

STAN SAKAI: *(Laughter.)* Well, Nilson Groundthumper and Usagi both started out as human characters. In fact, I have an eight-page Nilson Groundthumper story with him as a human and Hermy as a little troll. Usagi was a secondary character in the Nilson Groundthumper storyline. Nilson Groundthumper was originally intended to be a full-length comic-book novel, and in it Usagi dies. But anyway, I was just fooling around and changed them into animals and it took on a whole new personality. I really like them. Nilson kind of started off like... do you know the TARAN THE WANDERER series?

KEN: *Yeah.*

STAN: It was kinda along that vein, but when I turned him into a rabbit he seemed to have a lot more character and he looked good, and Hermy instead of being a troll became this little... I haven't really quite figured out what Hermy is. He's kind of like a little potato with... something.

KEN: *You could make it into a contest and have people guess.*

All art accompanying this interview is © 1987 Stan Sakai unless otherwise noted.

movies and reading Japanese comic books."

STAN: Yeah. I've called him a hedgehog, I've called him a mole, I've called him a groundhog. It never really bothered me. But anyway, going on to Usagi, when I tied up his ears I *loved* it. Design-wise I was really pleased. It just felt right.

KEN: *Tell us about some of your credits in the comic industry.*

STAN: Well, I started off as a letterer. I've been lettering GROO ever since it started with Pacific.

I've just started lettering a new series from Eclipse called KAMUI, which is a Japanese series that they picked up to translate for the U.S. market. I also letter the SPIDER-MAN Sunday newspaper strips.

KEN: *Have you ever done any other lettering in newspaper strips besides that?*

STAN: I've done lettering for the strip, MR. ABERNATHY. I did the lettering for the presentation for another strip called SHERMAN ON THE MOUNT. I think it was the first three weeks. I do the lettering for the MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE giveaway books.

KEN: *I love those. My kids always give me all of their doubles. (Laughter.) They're fascinating because of the range of talented cartoonists involved with them.*

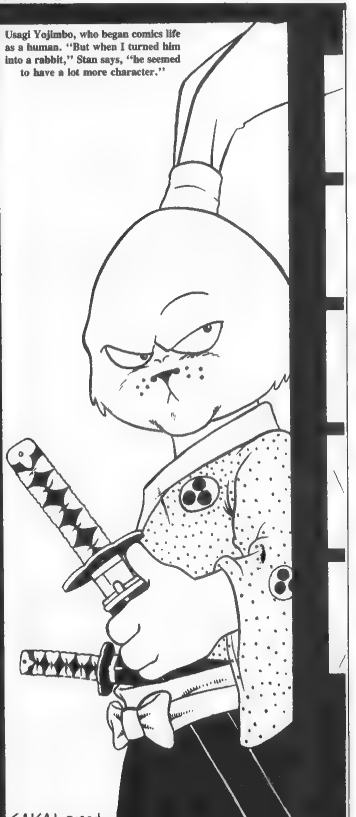
STAN: Yeah, there are a lot of good cartoonists in there. When adults hear I do the MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE books, I get two reactions, either, "*Oh!* you *do* those!? or "Oh, you do *those.*" *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *About Usagi, that's been . . . well, where did Usagi start off?*

STAN: He appeared in ALBEDO #s 2, 3 and 4 and then in CRITTERS. He's also appeared in a color story for DOOMSDAY SQUAD — I think it was #3 — and he's made cameos in Phil Yeh's PENGUIN AND PENCILQUIN and another cameo in a story I did for GRIMJACK #30. It was a "Munden's Bar" story. That was fun.

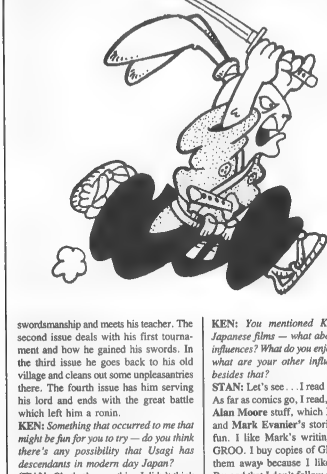
KEN: *Let's assume that some of the people reading this interview have not seen your work yet. Why don't you tell them something about it that would interest them, about your character and about your solo book that's coming out with Usagi in it.*

STAN: The storyline takes place roughly around the turn of the 15th century in ancient feudal Japan. This is a time of turmoil. The shogun has just been established. The age of rebellion in Japan has just barely ended. Usagi is a wandering samurai or ronin. The first four issues deal with his early life. It's primarily flashbacks. In the first issue, he learns his



Usagi Yojimbo, who began comics life as a human. "But when I turned him into a rabbit," Stan says, "he seemed to have a lot more character."

"My stories came out at about the same



VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Stan Sakai
Born: 25 May 1953 — Kyoto, Japan. Age of two, family moved to Hawaii where I lived for the next 22 years.
Current Residence: Pasadena, California
Occupation: Cartoonist/Letterer
Training: University of Hawaii, BFA; Art Center College of Design
Credits: Letterer — GROO THE WANDERER (Epic); SPIDER-MAN Sunday strips; KAMUI THE NINJA (Eclipse). Art/Story — USAGI YOJIMBO, NILSON GROUNDTHUMPER
Favorite pen: Kohinoor Art pen
Favorite Movie: SATOMI HAKKENDEN

swordsmanship and meets his teacher. The second issue deals with his first tournament and how he gained his swords. In the third issue he goes back to his old village and cleans out some unpleasantries there. The fourth issue has him serving his lord and ends with the great battle which left him a ronin.

KEN: *Something that occurred to me that might be fun for you to try — do you think there's any possibility that Usagi has descendants in modern day Japan?*

STAN: *Oh*, that's something I didn't think of. Maybe I could do a spin-off, a funny animal modern-day ninja/samurai story. I've just been dealing with Usagi as a character in feudal Japan. Yeah, that's interesting. Maybe I'll do it as a backup to USAGI one day.

Anyway, the character of Usagi is based very loosely upon a historical figure named **Miyamoto Musashi** who lived during that time and is considered the epitome of the samurai. **Musashi** was the author of the book THE FIVE RINGS which is now used in big corporations by executives as a guide to strategy. *(Laughter.)* It's very loosely based upon his early life, and of course I've taken from other sources, like all of those **Kurosawa** films and those Japanese movies I was brought up on.

"Usagi Yojimbo" literally translates as "rabbit bodyguard." I guess a bodyguard in feudal Japan was a position similar to a gunslinger or hired gun in the old west. The character's actual name is Miyamoto Usagi, a take off on Miyamoto Musashi's

KEN: *You mentioned Kurosawa and Japanese films — what about your other influences? What do you enjoy reading and what are your other influences in film besides that?*

STAN: Let's see . . . I read a lot of books. As far as comics go, I read, of course, the **Alan Moore** stuff, which I *really* enjoy, and **Mark Evanier's** stories, which are fun. I like Mark's writing. Of course, GROO. I buy copies of GROO and give them away because I like it so much. Beyond that I don't follow any series very religiously. I pick up books here and there and I enjoy those, but I don't follow anything really close, not the way I used to.

KEN: *When you were younger, what did you read?*

STAN: Oh! Of course, the old **Stan Lee** and **Jack Kirby** stuff! I grew up on **Steve Ditko's** work. **Steve Ditko** was my first big influence. I *loved* his old SPIDER-MAN and DOCTOR STRANGE strips. Those were great. I would buy almost all the Marvels and all the DCs. I loved those.

KEN: *Is Disney an influence on you?*

STAN: Well, a lot of those **Disney** things around the house were given to me — given to Sharon, actually. She's the stuffed animal collector. Yeah, I guess so. I enjoyed his work. I enjoy the Gladstone series, I've been buying those. Those are great.

KEN: *What I'm trying to dig back down to is your funny animal stuff. There must have been something primal or "Gee, I'd love to do funny animals someday!" (Laughter.)*

STAN: Well, **Dave Thorne** . . . I've always loved his work and it's primarily funny animals. I guess *he* was my very first funny animal influence. Before that it was always **Ditko** or **Kirby** or, you know, that type of thing. **Walt Kelly,** I loved his POGO work. I can't really think of any one funny animal person. There's a lot of European stuff. I think my *present* influence is primarily **Sergio Aragones, and for inking style a European artist, Milo Manara,** Sergio introduced me to **Manara's** work, oh, about 1980, and I've been looking *everywhere* for his books and things and I've gotten quite a few. Now they're being translated into English so I finally know what's going on. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Speaking of translations, has USAGI ever been printed in Japan and have you received any reaction from over there yet?*

STAN: I sent off a few copies to Japanese publishers but I've gotten no reaction yet.

KEN: *That's interesting. It seems like a natural.*

STAN: Well, Japan is not very much into funny animals, and whatever funny animals they do have are primarily geared at kids. It's a very small funny animal market, and I think my book is geared towards the older kids and the more mature reader.

KEN: *Have you always been a fan of funny animal comics and drawing in that style?*

time that the NINJA TURTLES came out."

STAN: Not really. I started off doing more realistic illustrations, but funny animals just came naturally to me. It's a lot easier, too.

KEN: *What do you see the difference is between working in black-and-white and color? Which do you prefer?*

STAN: I prefer black-and-white. I've talked to **Scott Shaw!** about it a lot — he prefers color — but I prefer black-and-white, I guess because you can't hide anything with black-and-white. What you see printed is what the artwork looked like. I don't like to work with tones or airbrushing or washes or zip-a-tone just because you can hide a lot of detail that way.

KEN: *What do you think about the big recent explosion in funny animal comics? Why do you think that happened?*

STAN: Well, of course it started off with those NINJA TURTLES people. My stories came out at about the same time that the TURTLES came out, so I don't consider myself part of the big explosion. I'm really disappointed with a lot of the independents, the black-and-whites. It feels like they're out there just to make a quick buck.

KEN: *Yeah, there is an exploitative ring to the whole thing.*

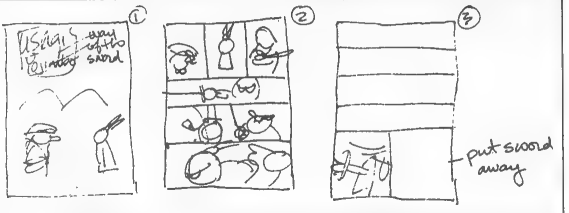
STAN: Yeah, very.

KEN: *What do you see happening with the independents in the next year or so? Do you think this flood of material's going to last?*

From GROO THE WANDERER #27. Sergio Aragones cleverly hid GROO creators in the crowd. The mustached guy above the minstrel is Sergio himself. – Next to him is GROO scripter Mark Evanier. Next to Mark, with rabbit ears, is Stan Sakai, and above Stan is colorist Tom Luth. Say — that dog in the bearded man's hands also looks familiar. Good grief!

© 1987 Sergio Aragones

"I've got books on Japanese history,


USAGI
put sword away
THAT WAS A GOOD FIGHT. I ENJOYED IT.
GENNOSUKE!*
why do you always show up where you're not wanted?
NOT THAT I WOULD EVER WANT TO SEE YOU!

Above: Thumbnail sketches, and Opposite: Finished pages of "Way of the Sword, Part One."

STAN: Well, I've been hearing about the great black-and-white recession that's supposedly going on now. My editor, **Kim Thompson,** assures me that USAGI's going to continue.

KEN: *So, do you think when the funny animal boom that's going on in the black-and-whites now dies out there'll still be a legitimate market for good funny animal stuff?*

STAN: I hope so. The way I see it, this recession is just going to wipe out the chaff and leave the good. I hope that USAGI and CRITTERS are going to continue.

KEN: *You have a lot of authentic research in your work, I know that because I studied Oriental culture in college. Has this always been a fascination of yours, the weaponry and —*

STAN: Well, I grew up in Hawaii watching samurai movies and reading Japanese comic books and I've always had an interest in them, but the person who *really* pushed me into doing a lot of research was **Sergio Aragones.** For GROO, Sergio does an immense amount of research. If he has to draw a ship — that Groo sinks, of course — Sergio will go to the library and look up different research books on ships and he'll go home and make up his own design and it'll be accurate from different points of view. He'll learn everything there is to know about ships before he actually draws one. He encouraged me to do my research on USAGI, so I've got a lot of books on Japanese history, folklore, the samurai class, war tactics, folk houses and country life. I've accumulated quite an amount of research because of him.

KEN: *Japanese folklore is something that would be fun sometime to have you explore in USAGI, the whole rich tradition of myth and demonology and stuff that's in Japanese folklore.*

STAN: As a matter of fact, in the fifth issue of USAGI he meets a kappa, which is a kind of Japanese water sprite, and in other issues he's going to meet a few other characters from Japanese folklore — like the dragon; Yuki Onna, which is the snow woman; and a tengu, which is a mountain goblin. I'm just going to toss in these bits of mythology every so often just to keep the book more interesting. Originally, I was going to deal primarily with mythology, but after doing the first story . . . Usagi's stories just tended to go their own way and it became more a historical piece rather than a fantasy piece.

KEN: *Let's talk about your creative process — what is the methodology of your work? How do you go from thought to finished product?*

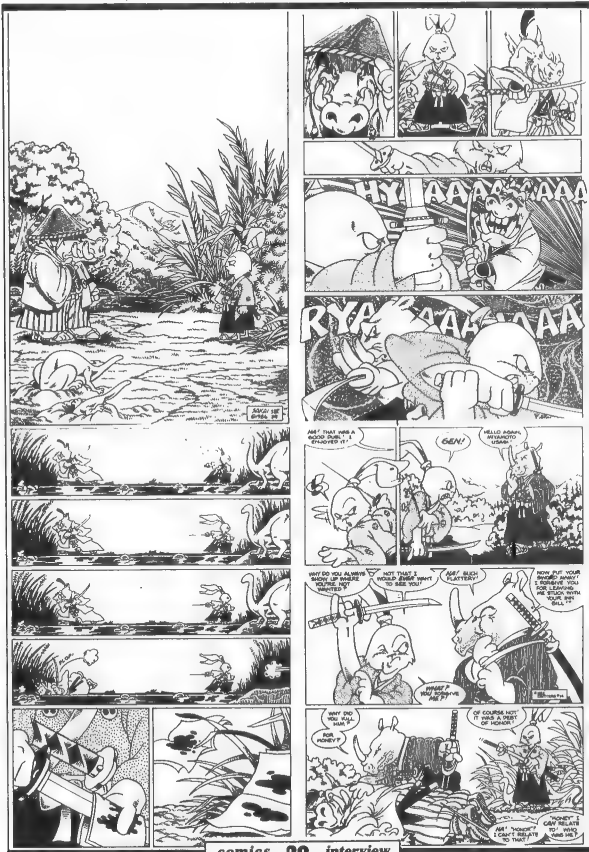
STAN: First of all, I write a brief outline of the story. I usually think of a plot, mull it over in my mind — for about a month, maybe — before I set it down to paper. Then I do some thumbnail sketches. I take a sheet of typing paper and divide it into six rectangles and each rectangle would represent a page; I do the layout and write the dialogue on there and then go directly to the finished artwork. The story changes a lot when I'm actually working on it. In the first Usagi story, "The Goblin of Adachigahara," I started with four different endings: the woman was a goblin, her son was a goblin, the goblin was someone else altogether, and the one that I used was that her husband was a goblin. That's primarily the way I work.

It takes me about a half to a full day to pencil an entire page. I work pretty slowly. To ink a page it takes about, oh, three to four hours. If it's very detailed, it sometimes takes a full day. I put a lot of detail and a lot of crosshatching in my work.

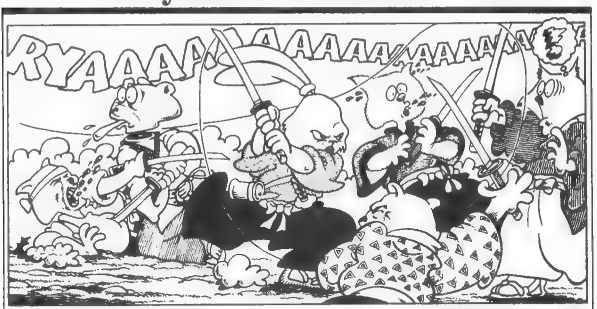
KEN: *There is an interesting amount of violence in your work.*

STAN: Actually, I have really toned down the violence when compared to a typical Japanese comic book. In those books

folklore, war tactics, folk houses . . . ”


HYAAAAAAAAAAA
RYAAAAAAAAAA
AH! THAT WAS A GOOD RUN! I ENJOYED IT!
GEN!
HELLO AGAIN, MIYAMOTO USAMI!
WHY DO YOU ALWAYS SMELL OF SAUCE, YOU'RE NOT SEASONED, ARE YOU?
NOT THAT I WOULD EVER WANT TO SEE YOU
HA! SUCH FLATTERY!
NOW PUT YOUR SWORD AWAY! I FORGIVE YOU FOR LEAVING ME BEHIND WHEN YOUR PAY WAS CUT!
WHAT'S YOU SCREWED ME?
WHY DID YOU ATTACK, HUH?
FOR MONEY?
OF COURSE NOT! IT WAS A DEBT OF HONOR!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT MY HONOR! I CAN'T RELATE TO THAT!
MONEY! I CAN RELATE TO MONEY! AND HER!

"I've really toned down the violence."



"You call this violent?" Stan asks of the panel above. Below is the panel "censored" by Fantagraphics editor Kim Thompson.

heads fly, blood spurts, there's gore, guts . . . I think I've *really* toned it down.

KEN: *Yeah, I think you have, too — although the violence never seemed offensive in the first place to me, because it seemed like part of the story.*

STAN: Yeah, it is. None of the violence is gratuitous. Each fight scene is essential to the storyline and they tend to be pretty short, no longer than absolutely necessary. There is only one instance in which Kim has suggested that I tone down a panel.

KEN: *Oh, what was that?*

STAN: Well, I had sent him Xeroxes of a story — in one panel it showed Usagi cleaving open a bandit's head and there were brains flying out of his ears and the skull was flying apart, and there's blood and guts and he's spitting blood; but after I sent it off to Kim I looked at it and said, "Hey, this is a bit much." I showed it to my wife and she said, "Hey, this is a bit much." Kim called a little while later and said, "Hey, this is a bit much." *(Laughter.)* But by the time he called I had already whitened out all the bits of brain and had put his skull back together, so it wasn't any problem for me.

KEN: *I understand you're going to be collecting those stories in some kind of MAUS-type of a format.*

STAN: Yeah, it's called the USAGI YOJIMBO GRAPHIC ALBUM SERIES and the first issue is going to be BOOK ONE. It's roughly 150 to 160 pages long in a MAUS-type trade paperback format. I did a painted cover for that.

KEN: *I saw that in your studio.*

STAN: I haven't done a painting for years, and I love to paint.

KEN: *This is something that's interesting because your books are fast approaching this status with USAGI — what about the concept of a hot book that's so bandied about now?*

STAN: Well, I never considered Usagi a hot character. Well, at least I didn't *realize* it until this past San Diego Con, where there were at times people lined up to get their books signed. At the previous two San Diego Cons we could hardly give away copies of ALBEDO, much less *sell* them. Now they're going for outrageous prices.

KEN: *What do you think happened to cause that? Do you have any theories on why a book suddenly goes from the bottom to being worth $200.?*

STAN: Well, I know ALBEDO #1 is scarce, it's *very* scarce. I myself have just three copies left. I think **Steve Gallacci**

"Usagi's 1st story goes for about $100."

gave me about 30 copies and I gave all of them away except for those three. At that time black-and-whites were not selling. He printed 2,000 copies and he only had enough money to print 500 covers, those are the "dull red cover" issues. After he sold those, he had enough money to print the other 1,500, and that turned out to be a bright red cover, and now it's going for *outrageous* prices. Usagi's first appearance is going for about $100.

KEN: *Wow, that's incredible.*

STAN: Yeah. Well, I have about ten copies of that. *(Laughter.)* That I'm holding onto.

KEN: *Sell those for $2,000, right?*

STAN: Well, it's just that they're mine.

KEN: *Do you see any of your characters as potential animated series?*

STAN: I would love to see Usagi animated. I think he's made for animation, really, because I thought up his design pretty well. But I'm not sure if his stories could take animation well; especially if you talk about Saturday morning stuff, it'll never get through the censors.

KEN: *I was thinking more in terms of a FIRE AND ICE type of movie.*

STAN: Oh, that'll be great.

KEN: *Do you follow those type of projects?*

STAN: I would love to see Usagi done that way, as a feature film or something. That'll be super.

KEN: *How about a live action HOWARD THE DUCK type movie?* (Laughter.) Whack! Whack!

STAN: Well, I've never seen HOWARD THE DUCK.

KEN: *How diplomatic of you. You know, it might be interesting sometime to see Alan Moore do Usagi —*

STAN: That would be great! *(Laughter.)* I would *love* that.

STAN: I know he reads this magazine so maybe he'll jump on that.

KEN: *What kind of feedback do you get from people, like at conventions and all of that?*

STAN: One question I'm frequently asked is, "What are those dinosaur/lizard creatures that always appear in the stories?" Well, I, like most cartoonists, love dinosaurs, so I drew in a mini-brontosaurus-type lizard in the first Nilson story and they've appeared in every one of my stories since then, usually in the background. They're omnivorous and act as the scavengers in Usagi's world. They've gotten pretty popular and so I'm planning a story seen entirely though the eyes of one of these lizards. In another story, Usagi takes one for a pet.

KEN: *What's he going to be called?*

STAN: Spot. *(Laughter.)* But generally feedback has been pretty positive. People say they like my work. *Surprisingly* people have commented about the stories, the actual writing, and I don't consider myself a good writer at all.

KEN: *Oh, gee, I do.*

STAN: Oh, really? I don't. *(Laughter.)* That really surprised me, and they say they like the research that I've been doing. I like the character, myself, but it always amazes me when other people come up and say, "Hey, I like what you do."

KEN: *That's great. When you're doing USAGI how deeply do you identify with the characters? Do they seem to be real characters to you?*

STAN: Yeah, they do.

KEN: *And you can really crawl inside of that world and see everything work —*

STAN: Yeah, in fact in one issue of CRITTERS, **Don Dougherty** was looking through the Usagi story and said, "Hey, Usagi's beginning to look like you." *(Laughter.)* I didn't see it, but yeah, I really identify with the characters.

KEN: *I am curious about your reaction to the censorship issue that's so hot right now. Have you been following the controversy?*

STAN: Yeah, I have. As for USAGI, I really don't know if I would like it to be under any kind of rating system or not.

KEN: *If you were doing somebody else's charcters, say, and they wanted to censor that, do you think that's legitimate?*

STAN: If I'm doing their characters, I think they should have a right to say what I can or cannot do — unless of course they've given me *carte blanche* and said I could do anything I wanted to do in the first place. Then I would take offense at that, but if it's with the understanding that I keep the spirit of their character, I don't

Everyone keeps asking Stan "What are those dinosaur/lizard creatures that always appear in the stories?"

"Many people just *collect* comics, there's

Evolution of a species in 3 easy steps. 1) Above: The first Usagi Yojimbo. 2) Opposite, top: The second Usagi, and 3) Opposite, bottom: The one we've come to know and love.

see any reason why I shouldn't follow their guidelines.

KEN: *Do you have interests in working on other people's characters or do you really just want to do your own?*

STAN: Well, I'm doing a story for the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES people. It's for a new book called TURTLE SOUP, where other artists create stories that feature the turtles. My story is a 6-pager, called "Turtle Soup and Rabbit Stew," and has Usagi meeting up with Leonardo, the sword-wielding turtle. I'm really having fun with that.

KEN: *Having done both, are you more satisfied working from your own scripts or working with other people?*

STAN: Well, I've worked with a few others. **John Ostrander** wrote a story for the "Munden's Bar" thing that I did for GRIMJACK. I enjoyed working with that except that I kept thinking to myself I'd like to change the ending. *(Laughter.)* But of course it was his script and I just followed it as best as I could, and that's happened to me a couple of other times, where I just thought, "Hey, I kinda want to change this. I should change this. I really feel I should change that." But again, it was working with somebody else's script. I could make suggestions but that was about it. Whereas for my *own* stories I have complete control. Fantagraphics has no input until they receive the finished story.

KEN: *That must be nice.*

STAN: Yeah, and they've been very accommodating. The only times they've *ever* edited my work was when Kim would call up and say, "You spelled this word wrong," and that was about it — except for the time, like I said, where the guy's head got, you know, cleaved in half. That's the only time where he's ever criticized any of my story or art.

KEN: *Are you ever going to attempt to just write a story for somebody else to illustrate? Are you interested in that?*

STAN: I've never given it too much thought, but yeah, I kinda would like to. I've got a story that I would *like* to do — I've been thinking of doing it myself. It's a straight science-fiction piece with people, and a little bunny. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, that's something I may write and ask someone else to do. Someone that I've always wanted to work with is **Dennis Fujitake.**

KEN: *Oh, yeah, his stuff's excellent.*

STAN: I grew up with Dennis and **Gary Kato.** We grew up around the same area in Hawaii and I just love their work. We would get together every so often — this was during, oh, junior high/high school days — and show each other what we had been drawing. Of course *everything* was **Steve Ditko** influenced at that time. *(Laughter.)* Dennis was really heavy into **Steve Ditko** and so was Gary. You can see a lot of **Steve Ditko** in Gary's STREETFIGHTER series.

KEN: *Oh, yeah.*

STAN: It's pure **Ditko.** But anyway, like I said, Dennis is one person I would *really* love to work with. In fact, Dennis is doing the backup for my first issue.

KEN: *Yeah, I'd heard that, that a lot of*

not enough who actually *read* them."

people are contributing back-ups to USAGI. Who else?

STAN: Well, the USAGI series is going to be 20 pages of new USAGI material plus an eight-page back-up by different artists, and **Dennis Fujitake** does the first back-up. It's about the Platypus/Tasmanian Devil wars and it's a tribute to **Vaughn Bode.** The second issue is done by **Dave Thorne,** who is a good friend of mine from Hawaii. He does *the* best funny animals I have ever seen, beautiful work. The third issue back-up is by **Don Dougherty,** who is coming out with his own series, BLAST. The fourth issue is by **Scott Shaw!** The fifth —

KEN: *What is Scott going to do?*

STAN: I think it's going to be about a platypus. He's working with **Mark Evanier** on this, Mark doing the writing. I feel I've got pretty good people.

KEN: *You bet.*

STAN: The fifth and sixth issues are going to be done by **Gary Kato** and it's a penguin story. The seventh issue is by **Phil Yeh** and the eighth issue is by **Tom Luth.**

KEN: *Who would you like to see do back-ups that haven't?*

STAN: Well, I have enough back-ups for at least a year now and I haven't really approached any other people. **Eastman** and **Laird,** I'd love to have their turtles. *(Pause.)* Gee, I don't know. There's so many people I would love to have *write* things for me. I would love to have a story by **Mark Evanier** that I would illustrate, and I would love to do the same with a story by **Marv Wolfman.** There's so many people that I would like to work with.

KEN: *A lot of people don't realize that Marv is quite a funny animal fan and has a background with CRAZY magazine and all of that.*

STAN: Yeah. Oh, another person that's doing a back-up is Sergio.

KEN: *Do you have any idea what that's going to be — or is it top secret?*

STAN: I have *no* idea. He's so busy. I left it open to him, said whenever he had a story I'll be glad to print it.

KEN: *That's something that I've always been interested in, is how much camaraderie there is among the GROO group.*

STAN: There really is a lot. I really wanted to have all of the GROO people in the USAGI SUMMER SPECIAL. Tom did the coloring for the cover, Mark did the introduction, Sergio did the pin-up page. I was *really* pleased with the way it turned out.

KEN: *Let's talk about Sergio.*

STAN: Do you want to hear about the creative process of GROO?

KEN: *Yeah!*

STAN: Okay, primarily it's Sergio's story. Sergio plots and draws it then gives it to **Mark Evanier.** Sergio *acts out* each issue of GROO in Mark's kitchen. Mark has a pretty big kitchen. He might say, Groo does this, Groo does that — I've *seen* Sergio do that in *my* house and he's *great!* He's running all over the place and he's just fun to watch! Mark takes the pages from there and he *erases* all of Sergio's dialogue . . . *(laughter)* the reason for this is that Sergio writes the way he talks, with a very thick accent. Then Mark writes down his own interpretation of what Sergio meant to say and he gives it to me and I do the lettering and give it back to Sergio. Sergio's pencils are incredible. A squiggle with a big nose is Groo. A squiggle without a big nose could be a huge army. *(Laughter.)* His pencils are outrageous. You've seen my pencils. My pencils are *really* tight. I'm always impressed that Sergio can actually make things out of those squiggles. Anyway, Sergio finishes up the artwork and gives it back to Mark who does whatever Mark does, and from there it goes to Tom Luth and to Marvel.

KEN: *You said you also work on the SPIDER-MAN newspaper strip. That must be great, after you were such a Ditko fan, to be working on SPIDER-MAN.*

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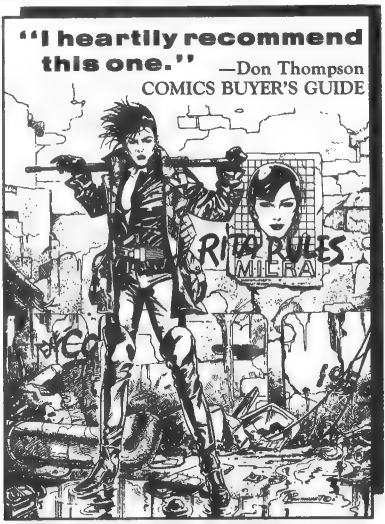

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"I used to crawl through sewers."

STAN: Yeah!

KEN: *It must be a lot of fun to know that you're lettering something that's seen all over the world in newspapers.*

STAN: Yeah! The main reason why I agreed to do SPIDER-MAN was that I would work with Stan. I've turned down a lot of lettering assignments just because I don't want to do that all my life — I want to get into more artwork — but when the opportunity came up to letter SPIDER-MAN I jumped at it. He just called out of the blue, saying, "Hi, this is **Stan Lee,** do you want to letter SPIDER-MAN?" So I said, "Sure, I'll do it!"

KEN: *Did he call you true believer or anything while you were on the phone with him? (Laughter.)*

STAN: No. He signs all of my books and things "Excelsior" though.

KEN: *Gee, that takes you back to being a kid again.*

STAN: I guess the main reason I'm doing SPIDER-MAN is because of Stan.

KEN: *I know there's something missing here. How about something from your childhood?*

STAN: I used to crawl through sewers. Sharon always reminds me of my sewer days. Friends and I made homemade candles and went down the manholes and crawled through and came up in the middle of the street on a different block. I just did this a couple of times. Back then the sewers were cleaner. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *Stan, you and I are both members of C.A.P.S. Why don't you explain what C.A.P.S. is for the readers.*

STAN: Well, C.A.P.S. — Comics Art Professional Society — was founded by Sergio and **Don Rico** and **Mark Evanier** as a social organization because cartoonists are primarily loners. I work at home and I don't see *anyone* during the day, and most cartoonists are like that. They figured there are so many cartoonists in the L.A. area, we could get together, form an organization so we can just talk and shoot the breeze without publishers or anyone getting down on us. That's how C.A.P.S. was born, and I think this is C.A.P.S. tenth anniversary year.

KEN: *Yeah, it is. There are some interesting people in the organization, too.*

STAN: Yes, right. **Jack Kirby** is a member. I think for one year **Stan Lee** joined, too.

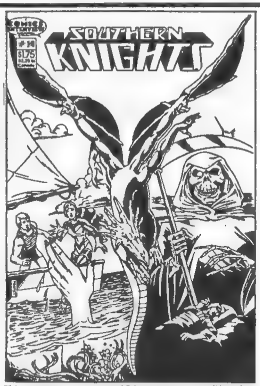
KEN: *Is that right? I didn't know that.*

STAN: Well, I'm not sure. His agreement was, "I'll join if I *don't* have to attend meetings." *(Laughter.)* You know, I work with Stan now and that's the kind of guy he is. Yeah, Stan would say that.

USAGI?!
MARIKO?!
RAMMO
REALLY, USAGI! I INVITE YOU ON A PICNIC
AND YOU SPEND YOUR TIME DOING INK DRAWINGS!
THE BRUSH IS ALSO A PART OF THE SAMURAI'S DISCIPLINE, MARIKO
THEN I HOPE YOU NEVER TRADE IT FOR THE SWORD, USAGI!
HERE, LEND ME YOUR BRUSH.
AND I WILL SHOW YOU MY SKILL!
HA! HA! KA! HA!
HA! HA! NO YOU WOULDN'T DARE!
SEE ME NOW AND I'LL SEE NOW YOU'LL LOOK WITH A MUSTACHE!
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
MOTHER!
MOTHER, THAT SAMURAI SAVED MY LIFE!
HOW CAN MY HUSBAND EVER REPAY YOU.
IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU'VE BEEN HOME, USAGI-SAN.

Stan's unpretentious but moving writing style can be glimpsed in this interlude from "Homecoming" in CRITTERS #10, published by Fantagraphics.

KEN: *Do you have any ambitions in the future to ever try to get your feet wet doing some other genre?*



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"I don't consider myself a good writer."

STAN: You mean besides just doing funny animals?

KEN: *Yeah. You already mentioned the science fiction. If DC approached you and said, "Gee, it'd be great to have you do a fill-in issue of TEEN TITANS," would you?*

STAN: Yeah, I think I would. But like I said, I don't consider myself a good writer. I think I'm able to get by. Whenever I'm stumped in a storyline I think, "What would **Mark Evanier** do about this?" *(Laughter.)* Really, I've done that a couple of times. I'm sure Mark would never do the types of things that I came up with. I don't consider myself a good writer, but then if the opportunity arose for me to do a story like that, sure, I'd jump at it.

KEN: *How would you approach a superhero story? What would be the difference between doing the kinds of stories you do now? What do you think the process would be?*

STAN: Well, first of all, all their ears would be tied up. *(Laughter.)* I have no idea. It's something I've never thought of and I'd have to really think about something like that.

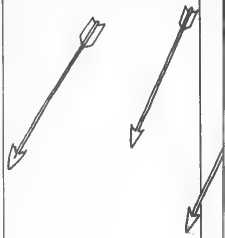
KEN: *What would you like to accomplish in the next ten years professionally?*

STAN: Well, hopefully ten years from now USAGI will still be going on, because I *really* look forward to working on USAGI. I wake up in the mornings saying, "Hey, I'm going to do this!" Aside from that I would love to get another character going, maybe a space strip or something. Again, funny animals maybe, because I enjoy doing funny animals now.

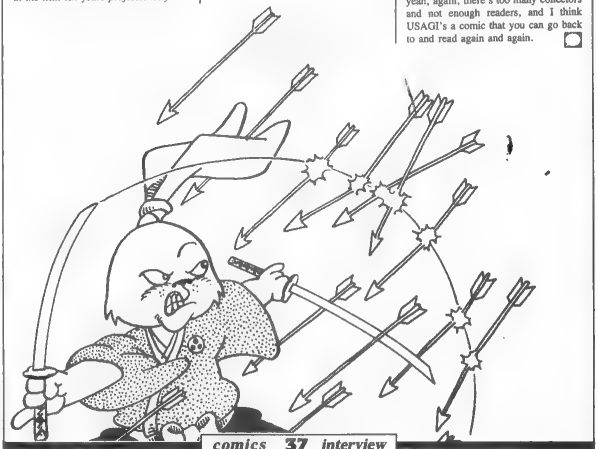
KEN: *Well, do you have any final thoughts — you have people here that you're speaking to all across America and Europe and everything, what can you tell them that would make them want to go out and seek out your work out of the other 600 titles?*

STAN: I don't know. *I* enjoy it. *(Laughter.)* I like reading my stories over and over again. I think it's suitable for rereading. There's so many people today who just *collect* comics, there's not enough people who actually *read* them, and I think my stories are very readable.

KEN: *That's what's wonderful about GROO, that people don't put it in a plastic bag, they actually read it.*



STAN: I do the lettering and I'm always going back and rereading GROO and looking for those hidden messages. Sergio's been drawing all of us, you know, doing cameo appearances in each issue of GROO. I think last issue I had a helmet with these bunny ears tied to the top. *(Laughter.)* I thought that was great. But yeah, again, there's too many collectors and not enough readers, and I think USAGI's a comic that you can go back to and read again and again.



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The Comics Journal #81-82: Mammoth interview with Dave (*Cerebus the Aardvark*) Sim.

The Comics Journal #99: Long interview with Arn (*Neil the Horse*) Saba.

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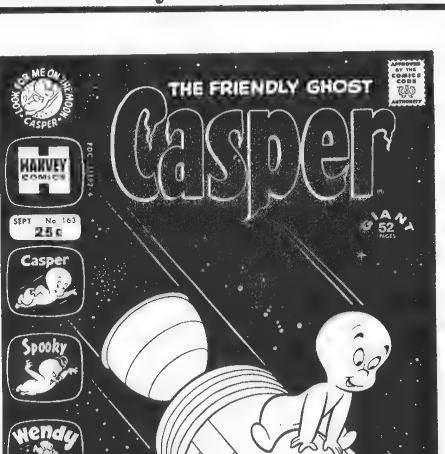
"All the Harvey staff was released...



© 1967 Harvey Publications

Grown-ups don't understand, but children love him the most — CASPER, THE FRIENDLY GHOST! Inks by Ken Selig, pencils by Warren Kremer. Note the logo by Otto Pirkola, who Ken says knew nothing about cartooning, but had the remarkable "ability to incorporate the *feeling*" of Harvey Comics into his logos.

I was the sole remaining individual."

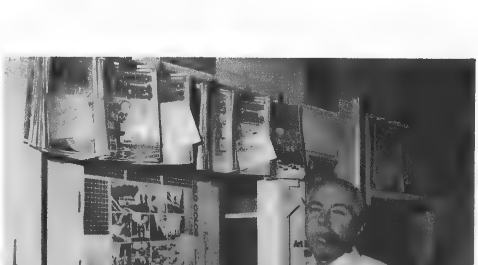


Photo Dwight Jon Zimmerman

KEN SELIG

Ken Selig has been aboard at Harvey Comics for over thirty years and is today heading that company's return to comics publication, having risen through the ranks from artist and writer, editor and art director, to his current position as managing editor. He is by nature given to coarse discourse, blunt and occasionally harsh — consider yourself warned. He is by spirit ruled by a compassion for the human condition and by an idealized vision of what his business is all about — keep that in mind. Look at his picture; the voice that goes with it is somewhere between Jimmy Cagney and Leo Gorcey, with Art Carney's delivery.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Ken Selig
Born: 23 February During the Great Depression
Occupation: Managing Editor at Harvey Publications
Favorite Cartoonist: Milton Caniff, Keith Giffen
Favorite Films: CASABLANCA and FIVE GRAVES TO CAIRO
Pet Peeve: People who are called cartoonists when they aren't.

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *I am talking to Ken Selig, the editor-in-chief of Harvey Comics — is that your title now?*

KEN SELIG: Call me janitor and you're calling it right. What I am, really, I suppose — just call me all-around man. Does it have a title? I'm managing editor, or course, as I have identified myself to yourself and to **David Kraft**. That's what I am now. Formerly an art director, since 1970; my predecessor being a very fine man, **Otto Pirkols,** who you've *got* to make note of because he never got the recognition *he* deserved in the industry! Otto was my art director when I arrived on the scene in 1954 out of the Cartoonist

"The so-called Marvel deal started

and Illustrator School, as it was called back then, before it became Visual Arts. He was, in his way, a quiet way, a guiding light for me, mostly by virtue of being a nice guy. It's one of the things about this business that doesn't really get said — the people that you work with, grow up with, you find yourself being more influenced by the kinds of men and women they are than by their artistic abilities. Otto was not a cartoonist. He was essentially a lettering designer. As a cartoonist he knew nothing, but that really didn't matter. The point was the he was a good image for Harvey Publications, and in his own very special field, logos — which I'm going to show you later, Dwight, because I know you have a huge ignorance of our field, like all you young pups do *(laughter)* — but I'm going to show you some lettering that he did that is *so* remarkable because the man had the ability to incorporate the *feeling* of our business into these logos that he designed. They're an example of what I mean by the difference between a highly technical approach to comics, which is prevalent today, and what would be the normal cartooning effort that would be put into something like the logo. Remember that name. I took over from Otto's art directorship in 1970. Prior to that I had been what you would call an associate art director.

DWIGHT: *You're talking about your early years there. What I'd like to do is kind of mix a little past with the present because there's a lot of interest out there in Harvey Publications. One thing that I'd like to ask about: Harvey was almost sold to Marvel Comics, but at the last minute the deal fell through. Why was that?* (Silence.) *Are you free to talk about that or not?*

KEN: It's possibly an area for . . . not to talk about, but I would think . . . yeah, call it for what it was; the money wasn't good enough. That's all, Dwight.

DWIGHT: *Still, . . . there was serious negotiation, and Harvey was dormant at the time, but now Harvey's coming back . . .*

KEN: Nope. No. Correct that! Harvey

More logos designed by Otto Pirkola.

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to be less enticing to the Harveys."

A rare glimpse of Ernie Colon's pencils on RICHIE RICH. According to Ken, Ernie added refinement to the Harvey style.

was never dormant! It's quite true that publication ceased in October of 1982, or so-called publication ceased; yet things were published — Tempo Paperbacks, for example, which I continue to do myself. All the staff was virtually released by February of '83. I was the sole remaining individual — mostly, I suppose, because I never really wanted Harvey to go out of business. I'll be honest, I never really wanted it to go to any other publisher. I would rather that it continue to be *itself!* Very discouraging feelings existed on the scene back then amongst the Harvey owners. If I have been effective at all in my career, I suppose, Dwight, it probably is in the area where I have had an influence, I believe, on the younger generation, essentially saying to them *don't let go of this place!* You can walk into the 21st century with this place. The characters renew themselves every six years. Granted, it's an unstable market, but you *can* still operate and operate effectively — and I really mean that — into the next century and beyond, even. As a consequence the so-called Marvel deal, or any host of the other five people who were bidding for the company, they started to be less enticing to the **Harveys.** I suppose what I did, if I did anything, was to make some kind of a stalling tactic. I gave Harvey a chance by virtue of me saying every day *don't let go, don't let go, don't let go* — it was a stalling tactic where it gave them a chance to realize that rather than to sell it off quickly maybe we *do* have something. Essentially, that's what happened. There's been this reorganization with the three principals now being **Stephen Harvey** as president of the company, vice president **Jerrold Harvey,** vice president **Alan Harvey** — one son from each of the original three owners. A compromise situation has been one of the things that has had to be adopted in order for the company to get going.

DWIGHT: *So basically then, you were successful in convincing the Harvey cousins that there was life to Harvey Publications, is that correct?*

Marvel's short-lived Royal Roy. Opposite: Richie Rich, who at one time was the most popular comics hero in America!

"...they can be real bastards..."

KEN: Yeah. Essentially I'm saying to you that I bought *time* for Harvey Publications, possibly by my own enthusiasm for the characters, which is a very *real* one — the characters that I personally not just like but believe in. Essentially, that's saying that I believe in the men and women who created them. I'll go down the line: **Lee Donahue, Stan Kay, Joe Simon, Howard Post, Ben Brown, Jim Meile, Warren Kremer, Ruth Leon, Helen Cason, Joe Rosen, Lenny Herman, Ernie Colon, Sid Jacobson** — the whole crew of creative people. We all came up together, virtually; some of us have more time than others but we all came up with the same belief that these were good characters, they were characters that were not going to hurt anybody. It's a funny thing, Dwight, we're talking about something that has so many overtones and so many subtleties, any statement that you make in this business. I'm talking about us here at Harvey Comics being involved with these characters but it goes even back *further* than that... it goes back to the Paramount Pictures days. Who the hell were the guys that did the Paramount cartoons back then?

DWIGHT: *The Fleishers?*

KEN: **Joe Oriolo** or... blast it! What's that fellow's name who was the prime motivator, the prime inspiration for **Warren Kremer? Steve Muffatti.** These were people out at Paramount Pictures making the cartoons. Little Audrey and Casper were in that crew of stuff that Paramount did for the segments. So they too were

Lil' Audrey.

responsible for this particular so-called Harvey scene now. **Alfred Harvey** was responsible for it to the extent that he was a livewire back in those days.

DWIGHT: *And Alfred Harvey was —?*

KEN: The original founder, and then his brothers, Leon and Robert, eventually came into the operation of the company. Leon served as editor in chief, essentially... not functioning as an editor in chief but, once again, one of those guys you would call a guiding light. I personally like Leon very much. Alfred is a man that I would describe as being born to the business, meaning that he was a born publisher. Leon was a good front man, meaning that Leon looked nice. He was a gentleman. In fact, all three of the **Harveys** has that aspect to them, which is something that is very important in this business — how you present yourself. Alfred traveled in a circle that was an interesting one, certainly: newspapermen, columnists, movie stars — had quite a few friends: **Bing Crosby, Bob Hope** any number of people. But more importantly they had friends who were in a growing business at that time and they helped each other, like **Irving Menheimer,** the distributor — a very close friend to Harvey Publications down the years who is long gone now. Uh... What'd you ask me? *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *You did answer the question in a rambling sort of way. What I'd like to ask you now is...*

KEN: No! I didn't answer it! You *weren't* listening! What I *wanted* to say to you was that there's a long line of creative forces behind this so-called Harvey look — and there *is* a very real Harvey look. I'm trying to say to you that it goes *back*, so far back, into the early '40s, Paramount Pictures, and then it reaches up into newcomers on the scene, punks like me and Ernest who came on the scene. Essentially, Dwight, I'm in the comics business, have been for 33 years, but I'll tell you something, I don't see myself as a comic-book man. I always have seen myself as a newspaperman.

What are we talking about when we say the Harvey style? We're talking about, certainly, the obvious trademark is a pleasant character. Even the most obnoxious character is a pleasant one in the Harvey Comics style. That's an interesting comment that I just made. The most objectionable kind of a personality, character, is still a highly-prized character.

DWIGHT: *Reggie?*

KEN: A perfect example! They can be bad as... They can be real bastards but you do like them and you're glad they're around because they pep up your world.

DWIGHT: *They're foils.*

KEN: Yes. Not to make a mystique about

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"Harvey was never a great payer."

it but it's Our Gang on paper. Okay, back to the Harvey style. **Steve Mufatti,** the cross-over man, was the scene. He did his pencilling chores with Harvey. He was very much respected by **Alfred Harvey. Warren Kremer** came on the scene and using **Steve Mufatti** as *his* influence Warren *further* established a Harvey look. **Warren Kremer** did the style. When Ernest and myself arrived on the scene neither one of us was looking to be with comic magazines. We were both boardmen. Ernest's talent was so very real that he could get out of a paste-up department more quickly than I could. I considered myself a newspaperman in spite of where I was. **Alfred Harvey** was sort of like . . . I could tolerate the comics end of it because Alfred represented a sort of like a contact with newspapers. He *acted* like a newspaperman — from what I knew of newspapers — and I always thought I was going to be peddling the next great American comic strip, like virtually all of us have thought. I feel I have the potential for the great American comic strip still in me and I suppose I will keep trying until I drop at the board. It's part of the character of what kind of people we are. We're dumb. We don't know when to stop. We don't know when to say it's all over.

DWIGHT: *Are you talking about creative people or . . .*

KEN: Yeah. Any creative person, if he's a *good* creative person he's going to be putting himself out on a limb and he's gonna be saying one thing and one thing only about his creative counterparts: *I'm better than you are!* He's *got* to say it because that's the only way you *can* be a creative person! You've got to think that you've got a special perception of life that belongs to you and only you and only you know how to utilize it. It sounds egotistical but it's really a matter of survival. That's how a creative mind survives. If we all thought at the outset that we're all equals then *nothing* would ever get done in the creative world at all.

DWIGHT: *Do you think this mindset allows creative people to be taken advantage of by publishers?*

KEN: *(Pause.)* The unscrupulous publisher is so prevalent that it should be identified as a disease. I myself. . . age 18, first whack at comics, Fox Features Syndicate, six months of inking done for them — I thought it was great stuff, Dwight. Fox had given me an assignment! There was some art director down there, a guy by the name of Bob, who really didn't think I was that good but *he* gave me the job! But I never got paid for all of that inking that I did for them! I'd go down there once a month, then it got to be once a week, asking is there anything for me, any check. He could only give me a look that said, "I'm sorry, Ken" — but essentially he was giving me instruction, saying: You're walking into one of the dirtiest businesses going. You're assuming that the guy who's giving you the work is gonna be there to pay you when the work is done.

DWIGHT: *That seems fair enough: "I do the work, you give me the money."*

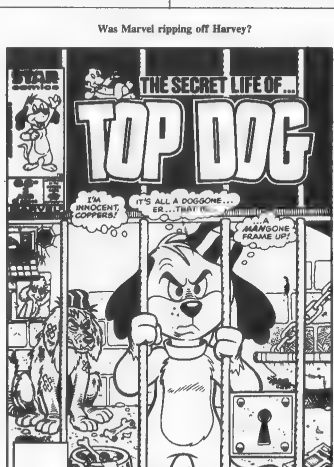
KEN: Yeah, the only thing is that I and many others, well, we never did get what we were supposed to get. What we did get from it was simply a kick in the pants that was very valuable to us as a learning tool. And then what happens is you come across the other stripe — see, not everything is all bad. Most of it is bad in this business but not *everything* is bad. Then you occasionally come across one or two publishers and, although it's still strictly business, it's conducted along more moralistic lines. Harvey was never a great payer, page-rater, but one thing I have to say about Harvey Publications is they never once in all of my time here have missed a Friday paycheck. The money has been very small, really, but they were there with that paycheck. There are good people in the business.

DWIGHT: *A lot of the Harvey people are now over at Marvel, working for the Star Comics line, and a number of those look essentially like a Harvey: ROYAL ROY, TOP DOG . . .*

KEN: You said that, I didn't.

DWIGHT: *Well, Warren Kremer is draw-*

Was Marvel ripping off Harvey?



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FROM

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"Shooter, DeFalco, and DC let us down."

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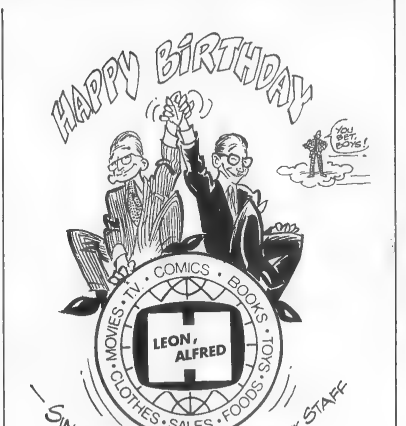
ing them. Howie Post is working on them. At a glance they do look very much like a Harvey comic, yet Marvel has been canceling these titles. Harvey's coming back. My question is, basically, what gives you the belief that Harvey is going to succeed where Marvel failed?

KEN: Dwight, I'm not quite sure that Marvel has failed. In this business there's no black-and-white answer to why a comic book is not particularly selling. Since I assumed the managing editor role here at Harvey Publications, I've said, "I'm gonna beat the pants off you guys." I really mean it, but I don't wanna see them out of business. I really don't. For one thing it would be no *fun* if I didn't have somebody to challenge. I *want* Star Comics there because I wanta knock it around with Warren. I wanta try to beat Warren. Now, you've got to understand something — this is the inner working of the cartoon mind I'm trying to explain to you — combat amongst ourselves never means that we wanna hurt each other. We do want to have a fight with each other, though. It's a challenge, but it's a very ethereal kind of a challenge. It's something where you have a grand respect for your opponent. Now, them I do have a respect for. I don't have a respect for the superhero sludge that's out there. I describe it as sludge and that's a pretty nasty word and you'll have to forgive me for sounding so condemning, but I'm afraid that my personal convictions are such, and my love for the business is such a strong one — except that today is Thursday, as I mentioned to you before the interview.

DWIGHT: *Thursday is your day you hate comics.*

KEN: If you caught me tomorrow this whole thing would be going differently. But I'm a very condemning man concerning the bulk of comics that have come out over the past 20 years, meaning that I have no appreciation of what appears to my eye not to be a cartoon. Today's comics have the look of being *non*-comic. The people who are in the business today, or at least the people who are being made to seem important, are essentially illustrators, and beyond being described as illustrators they're essentially technical illustrators. They are not cartoonists! The one thing that **Shooter** and **DeFalco** and the people over at DC have done wrong is that they've let you guys down. They should have been trying to incorporate into a comic book what is the essential property of a comic book — and that is a very particular kind of a look that makes a comic book different from an illustrated manual of how to put together a computer or an ad for an aircraft corporation. The look that's prevalent in comics today is such a highly illustrative one — and not good illustration, either, although the technical ability of these men I'm astounded by, Dwight — these guys can run rings around me — but quite frankly I've always been in great respect of imperfection. I *like* imperfection! It makes something seem human. That's what comics seemed like back when I grew up with them. Comics had a human feel to them! They were crudely done, but by virtue of that crudeness that cartoonist had to put something very extra-special into his work and that was usually in the area of conviction, sincerity. Now what you got is this huge drawing ability . . . No, I'll take that back; it's not drawing ability, it's *technical* drawing ability — that distinction constantly has to be made. Jim, Tom, and the crew at DC, they've let us down because they've propelled these men into a situation where they are the much admired cartoonists of the day when they actually are *not* cartoonists. The proper editor is looking for a very special quality in the cartoonist. A cartoonist is not just an illustrator. He's both a writer and an artist. It's one of those distinctions that is not made often enough — even if you only do pencilling or inking you've still gotta be a writer, otherwise you don't count as a cartoonist. A cartoonist is a very *special* breed. He should be called by his proper name, journalist. The man who can incorporate an idea, which is usually words, to a line quality, is what makes a cartoonist.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"My employers — the Harvey brothers. Gentle Bob, the oldest, now gone, but never really . . ."

DWIGHT: *Do you think that the people now — as compared to the people then — are taking comics too seriously for its own good?*

KEN: The answer to that, Dwight, would be that I probably believe that they're not taking it seriously enough. When you go

KEN SELIG

"Dave Kraft has hit the bottom of the

From 1946 — the last Milton Caniff-drawn TERRY AND THE PIRATES.

to art school today you spend four years there — which I never did, by the way, four years — and the first six months of your schooling there you take this six-month anatomy course where you're told about every damn bone that exists in the human body, how it connects to the hip bone and all of that stuff, where the muscles go and why they're there, how a thing moves inside the human machine. You're being described the human machine. Today's cartoonist has *stopped* after those six months and he's taken that anatomy course and he's translated it over at the publication houses. The publishers, the editors — I wanta think of a vile word for them but they don't deserve a vile word. They should be given a kick in the pants! They accept that six months anatomy course that has been served up to them as cartooning! They're *printing* the anatomy courses! What actually happens after that six-month anatomy course is you start to structure your mind. You start to ask how do you use this information that you have been given. Most importantly, you start to become culturally oriented — that's mostly by the mix that you have with the people you're going to school with. I myself have always been a loner in life and I haven't gone to college — I went to Cartoonist and Illustrator School instead — but I *do know* that I have approximated the best part of college in terms of I've had a cultural mix with the few people I've met along the line. The trouble with today's cartoonist for the most part — and it's a broad statement but I'm given to broad statements, because I happen to personally think that the way that you get to the truth is that you make a broad statement first, and then you go back and you start breaking away little pieces off and gradually, you get to a very real truth — the trouble is that the cartoonist of today is culturally an ignorant person and comics have suffered. That's my condemnation, Dwight, of the field, and I feel I have a *right* to say it because I *love* it as much as I do, and don't forget it! Our field needs a very real kick in the pants! It's got to get back on course, Dwight. The culture part of it is so *very* important! I didn't go to college, coming from a poverty-stricken family — when I was very young my father left to follow the horses to the racetrack — and my background was non-existent in comics, although I had a very real desire for them via my early appreciation. for **Milton Caniff** and TERRY AND THE PIRATES.

DWIGHT: *A lot of cartoonists hold up Caniff's TERRY AND THE PIRATES as . . .*

KEN: Well, this is one of the reasons why I feel sorry for you, Dwight, because here you are a young man of 33 . . .

DWIGHT: *32.*

KEN: That's really significant, is it? *(Laughter.)* I was about to say to you, I normally go by impressions, and what I feel in the seat of the pants about a creative person's work; but also, *inevitably*, they come out with the same back question: What's your birth date?

DWIGHT: *A lot of Geminis in the industry.*

KEN: Oh, you Geminis are a real *pain* to me. *(Laughter.)* The trouble is that you have such fine minds, very alert minds, and to me, being a Pisces, I like a challenge — and boy, you guys do it to me! I had a guy in my art department who was a Gemini — in fact he's still a very close friend — and I criticized him so soundly, Dwight, because he had such a good mind and I knew he could take it. I called him every vile name that you could think of to get him out of comic books because I wanted him to go to newspapers. He was one of the few people — young people, that is — who I would call very culturally well aspected, named **Angelo DeCesare.** He's over at King Features doing THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS now.

DWIGHT: *He's also doing a little bit of work for Star Comics.*

KEN: Yeš, the damn backslider! *(Laughter.)* Print that, he won't mind that;

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barrel by sending you to interview me."

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he knows I'm very fond of him. The thing is that I wanted him never to go *near* comic books again because — I'll be honest with you, Dwight — I pump that newspapers are the be-all and end-all of everything.

What's most important to creative people and how they react to the creative scene is the influences that they bring to bear on themselves. When you come into my office and you look at me, you being somewhat my counterpart, one of the first things you should be doing is sizing me up , saying *what kind of a guy or jerk is he that I'm talking with?* Essentially, you would want to know what it is that has captivated me in my lifetime. If you can root out what have been my influences then you're essentially rooting out the very real man. Why it would be important in my case I don't know, because I would think **Dave Kraft** has hit the bottom of the barrel by sending you over here to interview me, but I do realize that there are many aspects to publishing and possibly I do represent a certain area of it. I've dipped into everything that could possibly apply to making a comic book. I know the people who are so essential to the making of the comic books — who really get seldom talked about: people like **Ed Whitbread** and **Abe Beila** up at Chemical Engraving, **Bob Craig** out at World Printing. I know there's a lot more to making comics than just the penciller and the inker. There's these people who give you a nudge when you're trying to make a schedule and you're not completing it. They give you the nudge in a way where they're giving you a prop. They're helping you. All of these guys, any number of printers — I lay heavy emphasis on the engravers and the printers, because so much of our business has to do with them.

DWIGHT: *I interviewed Bob Craig for a piece on World Color Press for DC, and I talked with the son of the owner of World Color, and they said because the publishers wanted to keep the retail price down as low as humanly possible, they had to cut down on the quality of the printing, using cheaper grades of newsprint . . .*

KEN: . . thinner ink . . .

DWIGHT: *. . . different types of plates. The quality began to suffer. Now we're seeing an improved quality . . .*

KEN: That's quite true.

DWIGHT: *There's more experimentation about bringing the quality up. Suddenly, it seems like the readers know more about printing than even the printers do. I had a printing background before I got into the industry, working in the darkroom and also doing a little presswork . . . This is completely irrelevant to your interview, isn't it?*

KEN: Oddly enough it's not. It's entirely relevant because that's something that your readers would possibly tend to forget — that there is a motivating force behind the creative animal that is so necessary to his existence. Guys like **Craig** and **Whitbread** — even you in that stripping room where you worked, how well you stripped those negatives is as important to that cartoonist's work as the Windsor-Newton #2 brush that he's using. Everybody has a part to play

DWIGHT: *I should mention that I was not working as a printer in the comics industry.*

KEN: Doesn't matter. Essentially, we like the smell of ink, all of us, whether we're printing comic books or billboards. The point is that the ink is what has drawn us to our business, the smell of that ink.

DWIGHT: *It's in the blood, as the saying goes.*

KEN: Yeah, and also . . . we tend to think we're drinking martinis when we're really drinking some solution of Higgins' ink. I'm certain of it. *(Laughter.)* Getting back to influences — at age 17, I came out of spending time from age 11 to 17 making baloney bags in a factory, the baloney bag being that netting that they put on baloneys when they smoke them. Well, that was a very damaging seven years, because it kept me from having an image of myself at a very early age, which is important to us in this business. We've *got* to have an image or ourselves! Because I was a factory hand . . . I mean the money was what paid the rent in my family, but what I *should* have been doing was being copyboy on a newspaper, but quite frankly I was on the shy side. I always felt I was less than somebody else. It was by virtue

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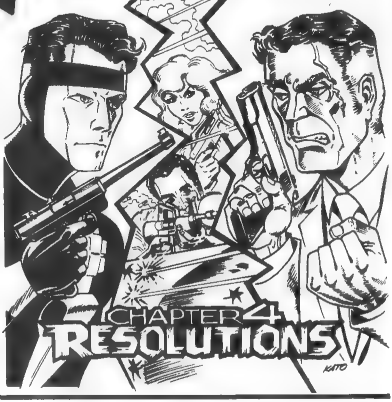

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"Jim did a stint for Johnny Carson."

Photo: Dwight Jon Zimmerman

of being in a place where I didn't belong, a factory; but realistically the money was needed and the money was gotten by my working there. Then, at 17, I made my breakaway, once I graduated high school, the High School of Music and Art. During my high school year — and this is where I'm starting to build influences — I came across a neighbor of mine who had style. He was somebody that I wanted to emulate, but I didn't really know how, because I didn't really have enough class. His name was **Mike Esposito.** I am sure you know Mike.

DWIGHT: *I do know Mike.*

KEN: Now this you've got to print, Dwight, because I owe Mike something: I don't know what kind of guy he is now; all I know is the guy that I knew then-was a guy I admired a great deal. I have an idea he's still as good as he was then. He had just completed his years at the High School of Music and Art and he was a neighbor. He gave me little encouragements and had me do some work for him — which was really terrible, the work I did. But at any rate, Mike was there, and he had a strut to him that was what I identified as a cartoonist's strut. Now I needed guiding, signposting, at that point of my life. Mike was a very real talent. He could draw like a sonuvagun! I could not. I was feeling my way.

Mike was doing stuff for Fox Features, too. I got the Fox Features inking independently of Mike when I graduated high school, but prior to that, Mike did get some assignments and I did some inking for Mike. It wasn't that great. I was heavily influenced by **Caniff.** My stuff didn't look that great, but yet Mike always felt that I was . . . one of the things that he would say was, "You got a writing ability." I *needed* support so badly back in those days! My mother, quite frankly, Dwight, to this day I don't think my mother knows what a cartoonist is. And yet we're talking about a grand woman. She gave me a lot of privacy growing up and we need privacy to make fools of ourselves. I'm a lucky guy for not having a father in my early years because I was a very independent person. I could pursue so many of my instinctual needs, like film; my spending Saturday and Sunday afternoons in the film houses and then coming home and trying to put the feeling of CASABLANCA on my empty piece of paper. You have no idea how exciting the world was then, Dwight, because my world *was* different from yours. You've got to take my word for it.

DWIGHT: *I see where the world I remember is a world different from what*

kids are growing up with now. Stuff kids take for granted today, a lot of it didn't exist when I was young. Stuff I took for granted then didn't exist when you were young. Each generation seems to look back on the preceeding one and go **Wow!**

KEN: Okay, but I hope we're not saying that we are banking on the past as nostalgia.

DWIGHT: *No. It's just simply the point being that we all use the memories that we grew up with as a springboard to get us wherever we're going.*

KEN: Well, more importantly, we have a responsibility to extract from the past what is classic. In growing up within our own field, we have the obligation of witnessing what has been good in the past and maintaining what men have established and bringing it along and possibly taking it even further. That's one thing that is being left out of comics. They are not paying *enough* attention to the past! What is the past in pertaining to our particular line? The past is **Beck.** That man, by himself, created the comic-book industry, I believe.

DWIGHT: *I'm going to argue the point: It was Superman who really saved the industry and got it going, and then it was the creation of Captain Marvel . . .*

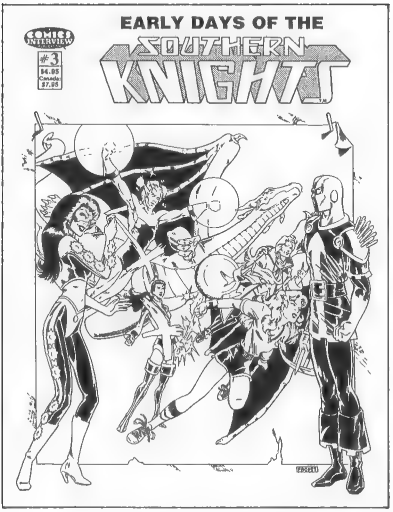
KEN: Gemini, you're all wrong. When I said **Beck** I didn't mean **Beck** as Captain Marvel **Beck.** I meant **Beck** as an approach to comics style. I'm talking stylistically, aesthetically. The man had an approach to comics where he was conscious of bringing in a very deliberate personality in his style. **Siegel** and **Shuster** I happen to like, by the way, stylewise, and you're absolutely quite right in what you said — forgive me for the way I talk, Dwight. Just take my word for it that I've spoken this way to almost half-a-hundred guys that waltzed through my art department when I was art director, and I've said things in a manner that sometimes is a bit brusque, but I've seldom spent time with anybody and talked in this manner unless I happen to like them.

DWIGHT: *Well, what I want to ask you now is . . . We spent a lot of time talking about cartoonist-illustrators and almost no time on cartoonist-writers.*

KEN: Same thing. In my mind a cartoonist *is* a writer as well as an artist. Of course, realistically, our business has its divisons and sub-divisions. If I think what you're going to ask me is correct then you may be saying to me: Who were the men who were instrumental writers with the Harvey style?

DWIGHT: *Well, there's that, yes.*

KEN: The first guy that I came across who was notable for a very individual writing style was **Jim Meile. Jim Meile** was, when I met him, about 40 years of age; that means at that time he had about



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"I'm beginning to see that there's more than baloneyskin makers in the world."

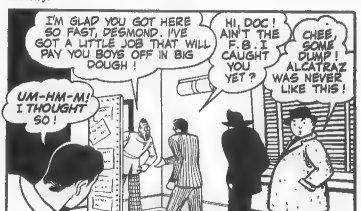
15 years on me. Jim had a writing career at Fleisher Studios and then came to New York and did a stint at ABC on a TV thing for a very early **Johnny Carson**. Then he did writing for Harvey Publications and was an editor. He also lived a very frustrated life that most of us live in this business. He had many things that he couldn't get underway. Yet when he projected himself into a CASPER comic page or a gag for the cover — he did virtually all of them — he was responsible. **Sid Jacobson** was, of course, an editor, and then I believe Jim took over for two years and that's when I knew Jim. That's when I did writing, because Jim would give me occasional things to write, one-page fillers and stuff like that. At Harvey back then I'm still thinking that the great American comic strip is just about to come off of my fingertips, so I'm constantly submitting to syndicates. Jim comes around and he's a man that I can touch base with, because he's had some newspaper experience, McNaught Syndicate. Then, in addition, it turns out the man has, once again, one of those *cultural* impacts on me personally, and he was a gentleman. I have a great respect for guys who are gentlemen in this field. I have not come off quite the one that I wanted to be, but I know that there *are* enough of them out there that really have style and class. This brings us back to **Mike Esposito.**

Mike and **Ross Andru** had a studio over at 45th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, a real dive. Now that's significant 'cause we're still in the area of influences. I worked as an office boy in a metallurgy firm, and they gave me enough money to go to Cartoonist and Illustrator School at night.

DWIGHT: *Which is where you came in contact with more of these people?*

KEN: I came in contact with more of the guys in my field, and I'm *growing* now! I'm beginning to see that there's more than baloneyskin makers in the world. I'm finally meeting my element — but I'm recognizing in myself a basic ignorance. Something's missing. I meet Mike and Mike says to come up to the studio. When I got into that studio something hit me. This guy **Ross Andru** was there, had a pile of books pertaining to painting! Those books covered the whole gamut of painting. As I remember **Ross Andru** he held back, didn't do much talking — but anyway, he had this very real liking for the arts. I'm not quite sure that Mike did, although Mike was very proficient back then.

Captain Marvel, by C. C. Beck, who Ken says "created the comic-book industry."


I'M GLAD YOU GOT HERE SO FAST, DESMOND. I'VE GOT A LITTLE JOB THAT WILL PAY YOU BOYS OFF IN BIG DOUGH!
HI, DOC! AIN'T THE F.B.I CAUGHT YOU YET?
CHEE, SOME DUMP! ALCATRAZ WAS NEVER LIKE THIS!
UM-HM-M! I THOUGHT SO!
MEANWHILE DR RATTE, FAILING TO ENTICE THE FRIGHTENED NAZIS BACK, HAS CALLED IN THREE OLD UNDERWORLD PALS INSTEAD.

WHAT'S THE SET-UP, RATTY, OL' BOY?
JUST THIS: THERE'S A BIG RED HOODLUM AROUND HERE WHO'S INTERFERING WITH MY PLANS TO SMUGGLE NAZIS INTO THIS COUNTRY WITH MY 3-DIMENSIONAL TELEVISION SET! I WANT YOU TO STOP HIM!
KEEP OUT!
HEART BRAIN WORK GOING ON INSIDE!
USE SERVICE ENTRANCE!
OH, OH! THAT SOUNDS LIKE CAPTAIN MARVEL TO ME!
BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! FIRST WE'LL KIDNAP DR. KIDDIN, THEN USE HIM—
NOT US, CHUM! WE AIN'T TANGLIN' WIT' CAPTAIN MARVEL!

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"A *skin* magazine! — We took it to court."

(Phone interruption.)

I just had a phone call from a guy asking for **Harvey Shapiro.** I take many calls. A good part of my week is spent answering phone calls for Harvey... What's it called, HARVEY MAGAZINE, FOR LOVING COUPLES? — which is not a bad title, I gotta hand it to **Shapiro.** I'm a great believer in titles making the effectiveness of a magazine. The only trouble is that the name of Harvey Publications has been such a well-established one down the years as an honored name for a certain kind of a family-ethic type of entertainment that when **Harvey Shapiro** came on the scene with his magazine it was bound to do us a harm, because the name is featured so prominently. Instead of saying, "I want a RICHIE RICH," you may have said, "Gimme a Harvey." It's part of *our* indentification! So, naturally, we did what we felt we were obliged to do, and that was to contest his use of the name as prominently as he did for his magazine.

DWIGHT: *And his magazine is —?*

KEN: A *skin* magazine! Nevertheless, the man's name is what it is, and he felt he had the right to make full use of it. We took it into court, but as many things happen in this business,you come to an understanding with each other only because you have to. You get your point across and you hope that the other guy empathizes with it. Of course, **Harvey Shapiro** didn't empathize enough, apparently, and as a consequence we both recognized that in sharing the same distributor we had to sort of live and let live. That's the situation that it became. I am worldly enough to know that magazines *like* that are always going to exist, maybe they even *have* to exist — I don't know — so I cannot put the guy down. I really don't know the inner contents of that magazine but I suspect that it doesn't have much class. Wouldn't that be great if somebody actually put out a class porn magazine? Does porn have class? It's got to have some class.

DWIGHT: *PLAYBOY projects itself as a classy magazine.*

KEN: Well, it projects itself as such but it has no guts. You know, those gals look so *slick* in there — and, once again, I'm a great believer in imperfections... *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *There are no imperfections on those Playmates. (Laughter.)*

KEN: That's probably what makes it not really a candidate for one of the good porn magazines.

DWIGHT: *Have you ever read or looked at any of those magazines?*

KEN: Of course! For crying out loud, I'm a male and I'm 50 years of age! *(Laughter.)* That's another aspect of this business, Dwight, that's very hard to say... How do you leave out the aspect of women from our business? We're involved in a field that is trying to create beauty. Obviously, women are in each of us a jumping off point — you watch that now — is a jumping off point... *(laughter)* ..for many of our better instincts. I absolutely know you have only to read **Canliff** Burma to know that women are essential to our make-up. We need them *so* desperately! And here I am talking about our field as if it's a men's field — well, quite frankly, I still believe it is. I'm enough of a chauvinist to recognize that there've been many great female talents in our business. There have been many women on the scene. You'd be surprised how many women have been on the scene.

DWIGHT: *Well, Eclipse Comics just published a book called THE WOMEN IN COMICS. I know that in the '70s and late '60's there were very few women in comics, at least on the creative end. It was a male-dominated field.*

KEN: Speaking as an editor with *some* degree of power — no, not power — but some degree of authority, I don't believe that it has existed, this so-called prejudice against female employees. It is *probably* true, though, that if man has been predominant in this field it is because man went for it and woman did not. If today, here and now, it is a male- dominated

Ken wants everyone to know that this magazine has NO CONNECTION to Harvey Comics. (However, Kelly Nichols, the covergirl, is connected to COMICS INTERVIEW. Check back issue #13 for further glimpses of Ms. Nichols.)

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"I don't give a damn that she's a woman."

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field then it's only because we *pursued* it for ourselves. Like *everything* — it's the history of the world — those who scrounge and make a stab for something, inevitably something will result for them. Now, suddenly, woman makes her appearance on the scene and she's saying that she's been neglected. She *hasn't* been neglected! She just hasn't in the past put that much of her best foot forward. Now she can put her best foot forward and I can tell her, in the new complement of comics that's coming up with Harvey Publications, I have got somebody in there that I'm gonna be using for scripting who I'm very proud of. I don't give a *damn* that she's a woman! To me she's just a writing ability. I don't want to know if she's male or female. But if she didn't come along and I've got six males, don't tell *me* that I *can't* use six males or that I've got to incorporate a woman into my line-up! I'll only incorporate somebody if I see something that I want, man or woman!

DWIGHT: *That makes sense.*

KEN: So, as I was about to say before the phone interruption, here is **Mike Esposito** down on 45th Street and Swing Street is on 52nd Street. Swing Street is a place where I'm losing my shyness, starting to become aware of things going on in the world. There's this **Bix Beiderbecke** record "From Monday On." If I've listened to that once I've listened to that umpteen-thousands of times. Jazzmen have been most responsible for forging whatever style it is that I have developed for myself. Whatever my style is has been forged by hearing a man's attack on a trumpet or on a keyboard. Essentially, jazzmen on Swing Street in 1949 were doing things that you don't find on the scene today, happening in music. For the most part they were . . . I was about to say underprivileged men. We're *all* scrounging and jazzmen especially were in those days; cartoonists were the same ilk. I always had a feeling that a jazzman was my counterpart as a cartoonist. Oddly enough, I met enough jazzmen — became quite good friends with them — to know that they viewed a cartoonist as being the *same* kind of individual as themselves. Essentially, the jazzman is in the business to do one thing; if he has a given line of melody, he does not want to give you the actual construction of that line of melody, he wants to break it up. He wants to *bend* it. He wants to do it in as few notes as possible. Do-you *hear* what I'm saying? He wants to simplify it! That's essentially what a good cartoonist is doing! He doesn't want to put in one extra line unless it's really needed — if he's a *good* cartoonist! The crap that you got here in your books now . . . damnit, if I could just tell those kids! I call 'em kids because it's becoming your field now more than it's mine. You're losing the entire quality of what good creative ability has been since time immemorial. Simplicity! Don't put in the line if it's not needed. When you look at the stuff that I've got over here . . . *(Shuffles through material on desk and comes up with a copy of DAREDEVIL)* **Frank Miller**, a man obviously who is *so* good, and this I kinda like because I'm a great believer in mood and atmosphere in comics — **Caniff** being the master of mood and atmosphere. As I told you before, down the years I've been pretty much of a loner in this business, yet I know about these people. This guy **Frank Miller** has been pointed out to me by many people. I've never met him. When I look at this I like it, but there's no good reason for me to like it, because it's violating every principle of cartooning. *(Directs Dwight's attention to the inner-office door.)* Open that door for one minute and see what's on there. This is something I had in my art department for fifteen years.

"You have only to read Caniff to know that women are essential to our makeup. We need them *so* desperately!"

DWIGHT: *It's a TERRY AND THE PIRATES Sunday panel.*

KEN: It's from 1942, I think. Read what's underneath it. That was for the guys I had in my art department.

DWIGHT: *It says: NEVER USE VERBIAGE WHEN A PROP SAYS IT BETTER. IF YOU CAN SMELL BODY CHEMISTRY, NOT HIGGINS INK, YOUR CHARACTER IS A LIVE ONE.*

KEN: All that means is that when you do a comic panel I want to see mood in it. I want to see time of day. I want to see illustrative matter highlighted in preference to verbiage. One of the things that a comic magazine should do is know when its function has ended, which is when you're 17 years of age, at the most. Comic books should serve to push you into

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"I don't know who the hell John Byrne is."

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the area of hardcover reading Okay, limit the verbiage. If you can smell body chemistry — what does that mean? I'm full of hack phrases. I'm trying to say that that character Burma or Sandhurst or, just to keep it as contemporary as possible, **William Overgard** — his MIKE NOMAD was one of the great underrated strips of the century. It was a continuity strip, but so well done because you could pick out the body chemistry of these people that the artist was projecting into it. Why in blazes didn't **Jim Shooter** and **Tom DeFalco** recognize the same thing that I see there? Why in the hell didn't they recognize that this is the kind of a man that they want to do their stuff? Now, when I pick up that **Frank Miller** page what I'm seeing is such a tight-packed illustrative mood for each of those panels that it loses in total. Look at that grand scene that he's painted here with that snowstorm. It's all good, but here — once again for Chrissakes — the guy's chops are sticking in my face!

DWIGHT: *I hate to have to tell you this, but this was actually drawn by Dave Mazzucchelli.*

KEN: It just goes to show why you shouldn't be asking me anything. *(Laughter.)* But the real point, though, if it isn't **Frank Miller**...

DWIGHT: *Frank wrote this. He set the mood. He might possibly even have done some sketches for him.*

KEN: Oh, I see. Dwight's just embarrassed me, but my ego is strong enough where I won't stand embarrassment. No, this man — and I call him as such because he's a man that I happen to hear a lot from young people who come up here, **Frank Miller** — he *is* an illustrator, right?

DWIGHT: *Yeah. He did do DAREDEVIL, both write and draw it, for quite a while. I notice you also have a John Byrne HULK there.*

KEN: I don't even know who the hell **John Byrne** is. All I know is these are the men who I claim to be technical illustrators rather than cartoonists. Now, when I was talking **Frank Miller** here, I was talking essentially a technical illustrating style and not **Frank Miller** as such — so all due apologies to **Frank Miller.** And to **Mazzucchelli. But** I wouldn't have been spending the time looking at your stuff and criticizing it as I'm criticizing it without seeing something there that was worthwhile making a comment on. The mood here is *extraordinary!*

DWIGHT: *This the the first page of the story we're looking at.*

KEN: The mood is extraordinary, and yet I don't...No, it's not comics. It's not comics at all. The cartooning aspect is missing from it. Now the guy that I would cite as being a force on our scene today, someone that I personally would like to make use of, is **Keith Giffen.** Now that's a man who is a cartoonist.

William Overgard's Mike Nomad — a big influence on Ken's 1955 syndicate proposal GLENN CASTLE.

DWIGHT: *Okay, keep talking.*

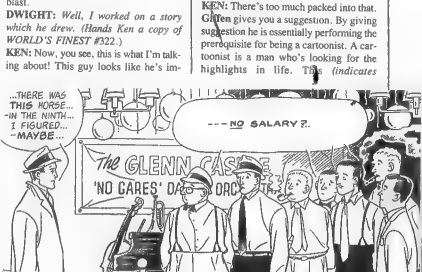
KEN: Uh-oh. the way that you say it sounds like you're setting me up for a real blast.

DWIGHT: *Well, I worked on a story which he drew. (Hands Ken a copy of WORLD'S FINEST #322.)*

KEN: Now, you see, this is what I'm talking about! This guy looks like he's imperfect! This is the first time I've seen this now, just let me see if I'm wrong. I hope he doesn't let me down. You see what I mean? There's a difference between this dimension shot...There's imagination! There's something being left out of **Giffen's** page that makes it less perfect than this man's interpretation of...

DWIGHT: *Mazzucchelli's DAREDEVIL.*

KEN: There's too much packed into that. **Giffen** gives you a suggestion. By giving suggestion he is essentially performing the prerequisite for being a cartoonist. A cartoonist is a man who's looking for the highlights in life. This *(indicates*



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"I have no taste for the X-MEN."

DAREDEVIL) is a full, grand presentation of New York as we are living in it 24 hours a day, and when you go on into the characters we're also unfortunately seeing a too-realistic enactment of what we see on a daily basic. A cartoonist serves a very strict function in society. He's trying to paint you a picture of life being lived *less* realistically than it is being lived. I don't like that violence at all. That was one of the things I was trying to cite to you before, Dwight — there's always a biasted weapon being used someplace in comics today, some weapon of violence.

DWIGHT: *But Batman was a violent character in the comics.*

KEN: Bob Kane's?

DWIGHT: *Yeah.*

KEN: Tell me how.

DWIGHT: *Well. . . you caught me there. I'd have to go back to check. . .*

KEN: I don't believe it, though. That's why I'm essentially saying that you don't know what you're talking about.

DWIGHT: *In recent years Batman has taken a faintly violent turn.*

KEN: That's not Batman to me. We're not talking about the Batman that I'm talking about. I'm talking about **Bob Kane** Batman. I'm essentially talking about comics as they were in 1940, unfortunately. It's gonna look like we're talking about the Golden Age as if there's no other time that can be the equal of the Golden Age; of course, that's not really so. They say everything has a renaissance. Comics has never realized a renaissance. I'm not quite sure whether it ever will, because it seems to me like the people who are needed in this business are beginning to exist less and less. That essentially means men who are given to a love of imperfection. Now, **Giffen**. . . That's very nice. Look at that. That's almost the equal of **Caniff** in his best days.

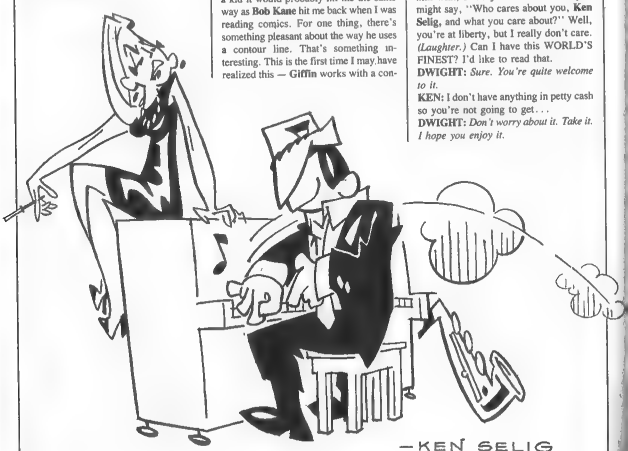
DWIGHT: *This is Batman's graveyard scene where he meets Astrid Olefson for the first time.*

KEN: It just goes to show that good things *can* be done today if we really *want* to do them. It's **Bob Kane** with a difference. If I was viewing this for the first time as a kid it would probably hit me the same way as **Bob Kane** hit me back when I was reading comics. For one thing, there's something pleasant about the way he uses a contour line. That's something interesting. This is the first time I may have realized this — **Giffin** works with a contour line probably in the same way that I have on my efforts. Then he fills it in. As a consequence of filling it in with folds and whatnot he begins to get an image — and this man **Mazzucchelli** does the same thing but he puts in all the emphasis on the inner, like we're seeing every muscle in that thigh. **Giffen** is not giving you that. In certain places **Giffen** gives you just one piece of solid black. He's minimizing. Now obviously **Mazzucchelli** knows what he's all about. His ability is astounding. These are the guys that I'm saying could run rings around me personally for their knowledge, but I'm asking the question *is technical knowledge that important to our business?* Or — forgive me **Giffen** — is the crudeness that I see in **Giffen** the real selling point? Call it guts, maybe. What makes this thing different from what we're seeing over here? This *(indicates a copy of X-MEN #201)* I have no taste for. To me it's like any other cover that comes out and, quite frankly, whatever the hell the guy is doing to the broad with the stick that presumably she's supposed to whack him with, I really don't care. And you might say, "Who cares about you, **Ken Selig,** and what you care about?" Well, you're at liberty, but I really don't care. *(Laughter.)* Can I have this WORLD'S FINEST? I'd like to read that.

DWIGHT: *Sure. You're quite welcome to it.*

KEN: I don't have anything in petty cash so you're not going to get. . .

DWIGHT: *Don't worry about it. Take it. I hope you enjoy it.*



—KEN SELIG

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"Joe Simon put out an adventure line for us."

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KEN: I *know* I'll enjoy it. I've talked with you long enough to know that you're not a yes-man. That's what I like about you, so I expect to find the same quality in the writing.

DWIGHT: *Thank you.*

KEN: You know, back in 1968 **Joe Simon** put out an adventure line for us that dived, and I mean nosedived — probably because it wasn't distributed well. You don't know. Search them out. That was one of the finest attempts at reconstructing the Golden Age. Now, even here at Harvey people disagree with me. We never had like minds here at Harvey Publications. That's what made it, to me personally, a very interesting place; and I've had my arguments politic-wise, aesthetic-wise, with Sid, Ernest and all. It was a beehive of opinions. I'd like to think we all learned something from each other as a consequence. At any rate, in '68 **Simon** put out this group for us, and this one particular character, Spyman, was so well knit together that he should have been the new Superman. It's a strong statement and it sounds far-fetched, but take my word for it; and if you don't take my word for it, once again, so what. The thing is that we did not have the audience for it. Now that's what brings me into another area; what's damnable about publishers today is not just the fact that it may be that the accountants are becoming publishers, but it may be that we've lost a very vital spark in publishing.

DWIGHT: *That being —?*

KEN: The very vital spark being that in the early days of comics, and maybe into the late '50's, a publisher told the audience what they wanted. He didn't wait for the audience to tell him. I believe the reason why comics is such a weak sister today is because the audience is dictating what is being printed. I'm a great believer in the fact that if you feel something in the seat of your pants and it's right then you can make an audience. Essentially, that's what publishers were doing back in those days. They were *making* an audience. **Siegel** and **Shuster,** that's exactly what they did with SUPERMAN. Even the lesser lights were men who were assuming that whatever they did was going to be right and you were going to buy it because they did it. You see, this goes back to that ego thing with our creative juices.

DWIGHT: *Well, if a creator doesn't believe in what he's doing then how can he convince a publisher to buy it?*

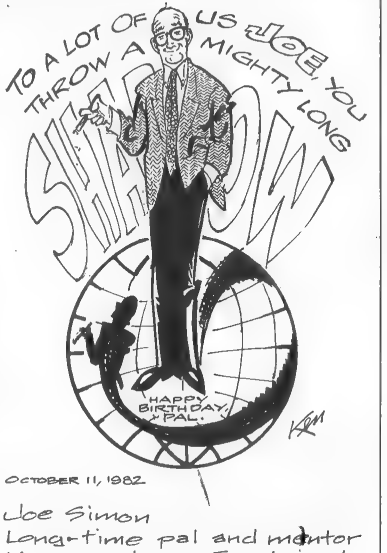
KEN: Well, presumably, Dwight, that's the situation that we've gotten ourselves into now and we can't find our way out because we, I think, are being dictated to by the guys who like guns, who like weapons. Society out there right now on 57th Street is a pretty violent one, and don't give me the pap about there's good things always going on — we know there's always good things going on. But essentially the overall look of the society out there is a vile one, and as a consequence publishers have no longer tried to swerve that violence away. They don't have that grand image of society as they used to have. They've taken that real world and they've transplanted in onto the paper page.

DWIGHT: *So, the heroic images that were so much a part of comics have been altered into an anti-hero sort of thing?*

KEN: Well, I'm a great believer in anti-heroes, like **Bogart** in CASABLANCA. Is that what you mean by it?

DWIGHT: *For instance, when Marvel Comics got going in the early '60s with heroes with faults — Spider-Man was basically a kid who was a social outcast and mocked, the Hulk was the Frankenstein monster reborn, the Fantastic Four bickered and argued...*

KEN: There's something that's said today — I don't know whether this is in reply to what you've just said, which I recognize as being valid — a generaliza-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"Keith Giffen did it with Ambush Bug."

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tion made about the film industry: that the actors and actresses have no faces. In retort to what you've just said, because I don't really believe in what you've just said, I don't think that these characters are that effective — in spite of what the circulation figures say. I believe that probably the audience is there for them because there's a quirk in the audience that has been catered to. These characters that you've mentioned are essentially no-face characters, to me personally — and once again we have to emphasize that this is me talking and that means you should not have to pay any attention to me if you feel that my words are going the wrong way for you — but that would be my very real criticism of these characters. They're no-face characters because there's too much going on in those panels. There's so much verbiage, violating one of the principles I mentioned before, that you get the feeling you're being given a selling tool for some kind of a public service announcement. These writers, I'm certain, feel they're creating something realistic. I contend that **Siegel** and **Shuster** with Superman, **William Overgard** with Steve Roper and Mike Nomad, even **Ken Ernst** on MARY WORTH, were doing something more significant with much less words and *much* less linework. What this brings us to, Dwight, is: How are we ever going to solve anything unless we recognize a mutual problem in our business? Do we recognize that society is something that we want to turn around as it is out there? We want to *recreate* it.

DWIGHT: *Are you speaking of a publisher's role either as a leader or as a follower?*

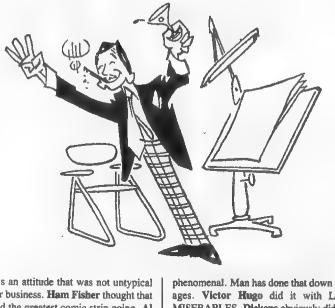
KEN: I always believe that a publisher or an editor is supposed to be the leader. This is gonna get me in a lot of trouble, but I believe he's gotta be a dictator. I believe that what's lost in comics today is the fact that not enough publishers and editors are dictators.

DWIGHT: *That's such a broad term. Could you define exactly what you mean by dictator?*

KEN: Yeah well, that's typical of the way I talk, Dwight. It's something where you have to give me as much as I give you. You have to add words to whatever I say to fill it out, if you really think enough of what I'm *trying* to say.

DWIGHT: *But I don't want to put words in your mouth.*

KEN: A dictator is somebody who, obviously, is not the stripe of a **Hitler** or a **Mussolini** or anything like that. A dictation in *our* business is a man who assumes that he knows what's good for the public.



That's an attitude that was not untypical of our business. **Ham Fisher** thought that he had the greatest comic strip going. **Al Capp** thought he had the greatest comic strip going. **Milton Caniff** is such a gentleman that he probably thought it but never said it! *(Laughter.)* A dictator is along those lines. He assumes that he knows the best way to go. I would add to it that a good dictator in our business is one also who doesn't really want to *hurt* anybody. He's trying to temper something that he sees is pretty damn ugly out there. When we did-comics back then we were trying to *temper* a society that we didn't particularly like, but that's nothing phenomenal. Man has done that down the ages. **Victor Hugo** did it with LES MISERABLES. **Dickens** obviously did it. The whole gamut. We're all trying to change that society as it is really out there, and *in* comics we've violated a very real principle! That is that we're supposed to be *simplifying* that society out there! That's what **Siegel** and **Shuster** did with Superman. **Beck** did it with Captain Marvel ever so well. **Keith Giffen** did it ever so well with that damned — whatever the hell that means — the Ambush Bug. I haven't paid that much attention *to* that but in just looking at it I *seem* to like it. That tempering aspect is something that has been lost.

An exclusive interview with the artiste extraordinaire!

MOEBIUS AT MARVEL!

"When an artist starts to work, he must be ready for two possibilities—to be rich and famous, or poor and unknown. And the two possibilities are very dangerous. The first one, because if you're well-known and rich, you lose your drive. You become fat and lazy. If you are poor and unknown, you are not able to work, you have to think about survival. You become very bitter."

"I don't know, really, what is work. When I draw, when I'm doing something beautiful, it's not work, it's play. It's work, but it's real work—the kind of work that makes you happy. Like a cowpuncher, or like a sailor or a concert pianist."

"It's gotten completely holy...before, I was like everybody. Sex and violence. I changed completely, I turned myself to the higher directions...you know, when I was doing a drawing before—for example, 20 years ago, in complete freedom, a kind of automatic drawing—it was monsters! Now it's something coming more from my super conscious than my darkness. Now when I work freely, without any purpose—something beautiful comes."

"Marvel, I think, is a very good deal because they give me the opportunity to be known by more people in America, and in exchange, I give to Marvel to open their production to another level. More adult."

COMICS INTERVIEW #45

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

NEW UNIVERSE: PAUCITY OF IMAGINATION

Dear DAK:

The **Jack Kirby** interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #41 came as a mild disappointment to me. For a man who has done as much as **Kirby** has towards making comic books an entertaining storytelling art form over -- lo! -- these many years to only get 14 editorial pages just isn't correct.

Particularly frustrating for me was the lack of depth **Mark Borax** displayed in pursuing the role **Kirby** played in the success of **Marvel**, and the reprehensible treatment he's suffered from them over their refusal to return his original artwork. He goes on to say "**Stan (Lee)** was production coordinator. But the artists were the ones that were handling both story and art." Popular thought has it **Lee** was at least equally responsible for the writing of THE AVENGERS, THOR and the FANTASTIC FOUR, to name but a few. **Kirby**'s creations are the bedrock of the enormous sales figures Marvel boasts today. Without him I shudder to think where they would be. The paucity of imagination shown in **Jim Shooter**'s New Universe brainchild itself shows how important his concepts still are to the company. Marvel should show some class and give Jack whatever he wants without taking him to court to fight over it. 'Nuff said, for now. And Jack is right, when is **Stan Lee** going to speak up on this matter?

You've had double-size issues on **Walt Simonson**'s THOR and **John Byrne**, I would have thought a living legend like **King Kirby** deserves no less.

Looking forward to the **Frazetta** issue, though, immensely.

Gary Kimber
2100 Bathurst Street, Apt. 101
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5N 2P2

I would love nothing better than to publish a double-size interview with Jack Kirby — the knowledge, experience, history and stories I'm sure Jack could share with us would be of interest to all comicdom. However, in fairness to Mark Borax -- who conducted what I consider to be the best interview yet published with Jack Kirby the man — *he was specifically asked by Jack and Roz not to rehash the Marvel art controversy, with which we are by now all too familiar.* — *DAK*

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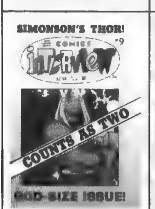

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NOTE FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Dave:

A final addendum to a *very* long interview.

At the time **Dwight Zimmerman** spoke to me regarding my TWILIGHT ZONE script, it looked like the story wasn't going to get on the air or, if it was, it would be in a vastly altered state. This wasn't due to the folks on the show — I can't imagine a better staff of people, or a more talented one — but due to the demon NETWORK — which was interfering with TZ more and more during the second season.

Happily, all that changed shortly *after* my conversation with Dwight. Due to some fine rewriting on the part of **Marty Pasko** and his partner **Rebecca Parr** (TZ's Story Editors), enough changes were made to pacify the dreaded NETWORK *and* retain the spirit, intent, and very often, the *letter* of my script.

So, in early October, I flew out to LA and spent a week observing the filming of "The Girl That I Married." The segment was directed by TZ producer **Phil De Guere** — and he did a spectacular job, both in terms of the story *and* the courtesy shown me. Just being on the set for filming is a rarity in Hollywood — where TV writers often rank somewhere below dogshit . . but Phil took me to dailies and encouraged my participation. In fact, the highlight of the trip came on the final day of shooting, when I sat down with Phil on the set and reworked a problem scene. Off it went to be typed up — and a little while later, there was the scene we'd just worked on being filmed. A memorable moment and a special time for me. Which is why I don't want to let those negative statements in the final part of my interview stand.

And I won't even *mention* the fact that CBS *cancelled* the series — *before* my segment aired!!!

J.M. De Matteis
Kingston, NY

KIRBY: SUPERB

Dear CI,

I was very pleasantly surprised to see the special **Jack Kirby** issue of CI (#41) on the stands today. I was even more ecstatic to see a brand new **Kirby** illustration of Silver Star on the cover. The layouts and coloring for the cover were superb, as well. I enjoyed the **Kirby** interview and was very touched by his comments regarding **Stan Lee.** Thanks for showing us the personal side of this controversial issue.

James Rubino
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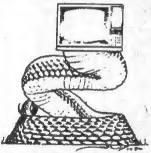

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